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all his later works are
by "a son of the marshes."

NOTES OF A NATURALIST

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WOODLAND, MOOR AND STREAM

BEING THE

NOTES OF A NATURALIST

THIRD EDITION

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1896

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PREFACE

THESE sketches of natural history, which it has been a pleasant task to me to edit, are from the hand of a friend of ours, a skilled workman, who has made the study of wild creatures in their native haunts the passion of his life and the exclusive occupation of his leisure hours. His work has led him amongst the most beautiful parts of Surrey and along the line of Kentish coast where Turner loved to paint. The observations are all fresh from nature; he tells of 'what he has seen and known.'

J. A. OWEN.

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WOODLAND, MOOR, AND STREAM

HOW I BECAME A NATURALIST

My home as a boy was in a quaint old fishing village close to the edge of the North Kent marshes. The place had an odd, irregular look; one would think its inhabitants had begun building from the shore up inland to a certain point, and then come back and finished along the water's edge. The top rooms of the houses generally projected over the pavement, with queer gables which were ornamented with grotesque figures. By the water stood old mills, warehouses, and shipyards, all having a decayed look. That business of some kind had once been carried on there the old wharves and fine houses showed, but when that was no one about the place in my time knew. It was entirely isolated from any other town or village. Railroads and steamboats were things known only by name to the general community.

The odour of fish pervaded the place; whichever way you went, inland or along shore, you saw fish not only outside but in the houses as well. To this day it is no favourite diet of mine. It is sometimes possible to have too much of a good thing. Nearly all the people got their living on the water. Poor they were, but a contented lot, and, as this world runs, honest. Now and again it would be gently hinted that they smuggled—who can say? the virtuous have enemies; they, perhaps, had theirs. One thing I can testify; if at any time a little medicine was needed, it was sure to come out of a very short-necked dark-green bottle, holding more than a pint, and that medicine was certainly made in Holland. The fishermen and their lads passed our house on their way to and from their fishing-boats which lay at anchor below in the marshes. On the return journey they were sure to have something in the shape of fish or wild fowl—for you would find a duck-gun on board all the boats—and to catch a sight of these was my principal hobby. When they found out this, they never passed the door without showing 'the boy' what they had got. To this day that is my title with the few that are left who knew me as a child. Many were the questions I asked them about bird and fish. I tried to draw on my

slate a dead curlew they had shown me one evening. The next time the net was brought and opened for me to look at I showed them my curlew. From that time dates my roaming in the marshes where the birds lived. I never rested until the kind-hearted fisher-lads had taken me with them to see for myself the birds they talked about. Fortunately for me I could read well as a child, and any book I saw that contained animals or birds I read if I could possibly get at it. Very limited, however, were the publications of those days—at least, for the general public; the children now have books that you could not possibly have bought then for any money; they did not exist.

I was often missed at home; no one knew where I went, and many were the reproofs that I drew upon myself—some of them very forcible ones, for coming home in the pickle I did. At last they let me have my run; the only question asked would be, 'Are you going in the marshes or into the creek?' Many a time have those fishermen brought me home on their shoulders, giving me a string of goggle-eyed flounders or other booty to take indoors, saying 'Tell 'em you've bin with us.'

Before long I knew where to look for the birds, and could mimic their cries: the shriek of the curlew

and his mournful whistle; the pewit, and the note of the stone curlew or thickknee—called in the marshes the king of the curlews. Placing the fingers in the mouth and whistling like the boys do in the street gives one of the bird's cries. I had plenty of room to move about, and no one interfered with me or the birds. It was not necessary. The Bird Preservation Act was not thought about at that time. The plover's eggs were left for the bird to hatch, and if the young were seen they might be picked up just to look at and be let go again. Bird and egg collectors had not reached our neighbourhood.

The miles of marshland teemed with bird-life. When the gun was used it was for the wild-fowl proper—geese, duck, widgeon, teal; but the waders that gave life to the dreary-looking pools were little troubled, for powder and shot with the fishermen meant money. When they fired at a bird they shot at something that would do for dinner. Fish may give you intellectual power, so some learned men say; I know for a fact overmuch fish-diet does not put much power into the body, and continued for any time it is a delusion.

The wild lands reclaimed in times past, foot by foot, here from the sea would be again under water but for the sea-wall which runs mile after mile, and

looks just like a railway embankment—very broad at the bottom and narrow on the top, where there is just room for one person to walk comfortably. Well do I remember the time when the sea broke over it like a waterfall. The men had some trouble with their cattle then.

I have watched the life on the marshes at all hours of day and night; in the early morning, when the mist rolled over the lands and the scattered poplars and stunted willows took strange shapes, while the red hares flicked the wet off their hind feet as they sat on the mole hillocks; at midday, when the gulls left the sea to come to the shallow marsh pools to bathe and rest—a pretty sight. Mixed with them you would see the pewits and red-legged sandpipers; you would hear them too—the cackle of the gulls, the 'pewit-pewit' of the green plover, and the scream of the redshank.

In the evening flight after flight of starlings made their way over the flats to meet in one vast host, in order to go through their drill before settling for the night in the reeds. They rose up and sank down again, turned and twisted as one bird; sang their evening hymn, with chatter and whistle, rush and roar of wings; while from the beach sounded the wailing scream of the curlew.

The marsh lands are bare, with the exception of the rich green grass; and you would not find water-lilies, only reeds and a sort of short flag in the dykes which intersect them in all directions, and which are inhabited by large eels in great numbers. In search of the reed-wren's nest I got into mud as well as water.

At one particular hour of the afternoon in summer—between five and six o'clock—the marshes shone in a golden light which tinted all things far and near—just such a tone Cuyp gave to his marsh scenes; and, to complete the picture, one saw the men-of-war, frigates, and sloops off the mouth of the Medway in the distance. Turner visited our marshes and painted some of his famous pictures from what he saw there: to wit, 'Stangate Creek,' 'Shrimping Sands,' and 'Off Sheerness.'

On the seaward side of the wall, a strip of land ran, about one hundred yards in width from the water's edge when the tide was out—called the Saltings. It was covered with a tough low shrub having grey-green leaves, *Suæda*—'Seablite,' they named it—with coarse wiry grass and the seapink; and this was cut up with runs and hollows caused by the rush of the tide. In these, birds would come to feed; my fisher friends moored their boats near the

spot, and if they thought a bird would please me it was sure to be got for 'the boy.' One day a lad made a sign to me; I knew what it meant, and followed him to his home. Opening the door, he pointed to something in a corner, saying, 'There, mind he don't nip ye!'

It was a black-backed gull, one of the largest of his kind, quite capable, if I had given him the chance, of wrenching one of my small fingers off.

'Father 's just winged him; he ain't hurt you? Come an' draw his pictur.'

I did draw its picture, to his great satisfaction, if not to my own, and made him a present of it.

One day I was missing, for early in the morning a lad had whispered to me, 'Father's boat will come in on the next tide; he's bin away all the week on the fishing ground. Goin' to meet him, ain't 'ee, eh?'

In the evening something was seen moving up the street in front of the fishermen covered with wings What it was the folks could not at first make out. Coming a little nearer some one shouted, 'It's the boy with his birds!'

The boy went to bed that night in a reflective mood; for he had been corrected in the very forcible manner before hinted at. The next day found him

in the creek with a fork tied on to a stick, spearing flounders and catching crabs. The creek was wide, and very shallow when the tide was out; not more than a foot in depth, and the water clear. When the tide was in, there was twenty feet of water in the middle.

In our small village each one knew the other; my companions at times were what the present more refined state of society might term 'doubtful.' They lived by the gun. But they were good to me. Many a time have I been with them over the Saltings, close to heel, ready to drop or crawl at a motion when the water spaniel got the scent of fowl. Sure shots and true field-naturalists, they knew them all, and where to find them. I owe my early insight into bird-life to these men, and to an inborn love of all living creatures. Coming past the long shallow pools, my companion would point out the various waders, their bodies reflected in the clear water by the light of the setting sun, and the tern, with his shuttlecock flight, catching insects and small fish. On one strip of beach I have watched the dotterels for hours; they nested there—if the spot on the shingle where they laid their eggs could be called a nest.

The man with whom I went out oftenest told me of a struggle he once had with a great sea-eagle that

was shot in the wing on the rabbit links in the marsh, just enough to prevent his rising. Many a time have I gazed on that bird ; they made no fuss over him, he was not the first of his kind which had visited our shore.

I remember well the day one of my school companions, not much more than a boy, went out with a borrowed boat and a gun, and shot a wild swan—a fine Hooper—dead with the first shot, on a rising tide.

Wandering over the marshes, wading in the creek, exploring the reed beds and swamps, together with having the run of the sea-shore, will go a long way in giving a boy an amount of self-reliance which may be of use to him in the future. Some kind friend sent me a box of water colours, paper, and brushes, and a good lead pencil—a precious gift to me, and a source of joy to my companions, the fisher-lads.

They said the boy could make them 'real good picturs' now, coloured 'nateral as life.' They knew nothing better in the way of art, and I no greater pleasure than to reproduce in my rough fashion the creatures that were a never-failing interest to me ; so we were all satisfied.

A good mile from our village stands the grand old parish church, with its massive square tower built of

flint stones, a prominent object, which can be seen from far over the water. The churchyard is full of fine old walnut trees; it looks more like a wood than a burial-ground, and it has enough room wherein to bury the dead of twenty parishes. The interior of the church is beautiful; arches supported on pillars rise to the roof in the centre and side aisles. The windows of rare old stained glass throw many varied tints on wall and pavement, in which are slabs inlaid with beautiful brasses of a bygone day—of knight and lady, with hound at foot and hawk on wrist. Suits of armour hang from the walls. The ends of the farmers' stalls are carved in odd and familiar devices, a fox and goose, a pig in a sitting posture, and others equally comic and grotesque. The pews in which we sat were so high-backed that you could not see the occupants of the next one to your own without standing up. Why so large a church should have been built where so few people were, no one knew. To solve that question one would have to go many generations back. Like the other churches on the coast, it fronted the sea. Many a fisherman has rejoiced at hearing the chimes ring out over the water on a Sunday morning, whilst his boat was making the harbour tide.

In that same church as a boy I got in a pretty

pickle. We all went there, rich and poor. There was no organ in it in my days. The mixed choir sang, accompanied by clarionet, viol, and oboe, and real good old-fashioned singing it was. In the same pew with me and my folks sat a shoemaker, a little man, who came in a swallow-tailed brown coat and a stiff stand-up collar reaching to his ears, knee-breeches, worsted stockings, and low shoes. He took snuff, and what a nose he had wherein to put it. He got the nickname of 'Grunter,' because he went to sleep in church as a rule, and snored. Never shall I forget one particular Sunday afternoon. About the middle of the service two starlings had come in and perched on one of the pillars, where they had whistled and chattered their loudest, but no notice had been taken of so common an event as that. But later on the Grunter fell asleep. From hard breathing the sounds in his corner gradually increased until they became pig-like grunts and whines, whilst his nose went working and twisting like a mole's.

I saw a head rise up from the next pew, and a strong hand grasped the Grunter's collar. One good shake, and then the shoemaker's voice was raised loudly, 'For evermore, amen. Eh! What!'

Forgetting the solemnity of the place and time, I burst out in a perfect yell of laughter, which some

kind soul smothered as soon as he could by cramming his silk pocket-handkerchief into my mouth. Then they ungently led me out. Oh dear!

When I was about twenty years of age, domestic changes caused me to leave my old marshland home. I parted with my old companions and kind friends with sorrow. Just as I was going a hamper was brought for me. It was a parting gift, and contained water birds and waders, beautiful creatures captured by the fishermen and their lads, as a last gift to 'the boy,' as they still called me.

A WINTER'S DAY IN THE MARSHES

SOME time after I had settled in Surrey I revisited my old marshland home. Such a welcome I received from my boyhood's friends as does me good to think about.

Shooting was the order of the day; and I knew how to use a duck-gun. If I live to be very old, I think I shall never forget the sight of the marshes as they looked in that unusually severe winter-time. For mile upon mile the grass, hedges, dykes, and reed-beds were covered with snow frozen hard on the surface. So deep it lay that it formed an unbroken plain, and it was impossible to tell what you were walking over. The fowl, driven off the water by the fierce north-easters, sought the shelter of the creek, where great masses of ice were crunching together; wild duck, golden-eye, widgeon and teal, with the divers—all tamed by the frost, so that you could get within shooting distance of them. The dunlins flew in clouds over the flats. A splendid sight they were

glittering in the sun like silver at one moment, the next becoming invisible as they turned in their flight. The birds were of little use for eating ; they were poor as poverty itself, almost starved. Tons of good fresh fish were used as manure on the fields ; there was no market for them. They were placed in heaps of about a bushel each at given distances, all over the land. The gulls soon found it out, and the food they could not get on the water they got on the shore. Black-backed gulls, grey, common and black-headed gulls, came with the hooded crows and fought, gorged, and cackled all day long.

The vegetable-feeding wild geese, wariest of birds, flew overhead with slow flapping flight ; they were hardly worth shooting ; the mud froze on the flats as the ebbing tide left them, so that the sea grass and other marine plants were not available for food. The curlews, mere frames covered with feathers, shrieked and wailed continuously. Such was bird life on the marsh during this terrible winter by day. A hard blue sky formed a background to the long glittering plain.

By night the scene was grand and weird ; the sky deep blue, the wild fowl uttering call notes, as they passed and repassed over the stretch of marshland all white and level, on their way to their feeding grounds.

Now and again came the subdued quack of the wild duck at the report of the gun and the fall of his mate, mingled with the whistling of the widgeon and the scape-scape-scape of snipes on the wing ; and last, not least, the hoarse cry of the hungry heron.

All at once, yet far off, a cry comes over the flats, as though from a pack of hounds in full cry in the air. Grasping my arm, my companion, a grey-haired old man, says, 'Do yo' hear that, boy?'

Yes, I hear. Nearer and nearer it comes ; and now is heard the rush of many wings with strange unearthly yelp and bark. The sounds pass over us and then die away in the distance.

'Let the fowl be for to-night, and we will get home ; there's bad luck about when the Hell hounds are on the hunt:[1] you know what took place here? They heard them then ; we are standing on the very spot ; let us move.'

And the old man drags me on in nervous haste.

I knew the story well. A father and his son—I knew them both—had gone down for the night shooting. The son, unknown to his father, moved

[1] The strange cries heard in the air, I have no doubt, proceeded from a mixed flight of white-fronted and Barnacle geese, rare visitors on that part of the coast. During that fearful winter birds of a feather did not at all times keep to their own company.

from his standing-place. Taking the worsted ball on his boy's cap for the head of a bird, in the dim uncertain light, the man fired and killed him. And there, where we stood and listened to the cry of the air-hounds, above all the cry and clang of wild fowl, the father's terrible cry of agony rang out, 'My son, oh my son!'

The next morning found me in my old haunts again. A hard blue sky was overhead, without a vestige of cloud; the wind blowing bitter keen from the east, and the marshes covered with frozen snow, so deep in many places that few travellers would dare venture out there; but I wanted birds as specimens, and the long-continued cold had made them tame.

The tide is running up, and the birds are on flight from place to place. There are very treacherous traps for the unwary in the Saltings—that meadow-like space left between the salt water and the sea wall. To look at it you would think it easy travelling; but the thick growth of the sea-blite and coarse grass and rush conceals the runs and dykes made by the rush of the tide, some of which lead to the sluice-gates in the sea wall. The force of the tide opens these in flowing up, and fills all the dykes; when the ebb takes place the gates close again.

Four, five, to eight feet in depth these runs and dykes are; only a marshman can go safely over these places.

Nothing is to be seen yet but a few hooded crows on the prowl. It is no use to think of shooting the Saltings just now, so we turn into the marsh to look about for a bit: and the curlews screaming will let us know when the tide has turned. What a long dreary space it is, covered with glittering snow! Here and there the reeds and flags along the dykes have been bowed right over, and form a rough kind of tunnelling roofed with snow. It is not of the least use to exercise caution, for the crunch, crunch of the foot tells its tale. But the cold is fearful, and a bird will not leave shelter if he can possibly help it; so we tramp on in the hope of a chance shot.

A dark patch shows on the snow; reaching it we find it is a marsh spring not frozen. Here and there you come upon such; also the footprints of the heron, for the snow is soft round the margins of these springs. There are no signs of the web-footed or hen-footed fowl here; only the heron is about.

The other birds do not like him; for he is always hungry, and his stomach is very accommodating. Near some pollard willows some starved-out fieldfares are bunched up. They utter a feeble 'chuck' at

times; their feathers are puffed out, making them look twice their natural size. A gull comes flapping over on the hunt, for a dead or wounded bird is a nice meal for him. From a bunch of dead flags, with a scape-scape-scape up springs a snipe with that twist-and-turn-about flight peculiar to himself and his relatives. He is not fired at, for if there are any fowl in hiding anywhere in his line of flight that cry will move them. It has done so; three mallards rise from a dyke; they are low down and fly straight to where I am standing by the willows; three in a line, their green heads glistening in the sun, and the red-brown of their breasts showing distinctly. They are near enough now, I think, two of them at any rate. 'Bang!' 'Quack, quack;' a twist and turn of their necks and bodies tells that they have been hit, but neither bird falls. It serves one right, for it is almost useless firing at fowl coming right at you: the breast feathers are so thick. It is a warning to resist temptation for the future. As we near the Saltings something springs from a patch of dead flag; which we shoot, and it proves to be a fine specimen of the short-eared owl or 'woodcock owl' of the marshmen. His light body and hawk-like flight often lead folks to take him for some other bird. He hunts by day as well as in the evening;

any hen-footed fowl, not too big for him, is his prey. The 'shore-shooters' know him well; they see him, just as the light begins to fade, come skimming over the flats, now high up, the next moment close to the ground. All at once he stops, and fans with his wings like a kestrel over a tuft of rushes. That fanning of the wings is remarkable; it causes a current of air, much stronger than any one would imagine, which rattles and stirs the dry rushes, so that any creature that has sheltered there comes out and the owl gets it. His near relative, the long-eared owl, has the same tactics on the heaths and commons which are his hunting-ground. He makes the leaves and twigs rattle with the fanning of his wings in the same way. They do not eat all that they catch at the time, but hide it till wanted, and the contents of their larder would surprise many people.

As we near the sea-wall something shoots over it: a male sparrow-hawk, in full plumage—a fine little fellow. We crouch down in between the hillocks and observe his movements; the bird he was after has taken cover. After a sharp turn or two he settles on a clod of broken-up turf—a perfect study; if you had not seen him perch you might pass close, and not notice him. That tuft of grey sea-blite matches his grey back, and a stem of broken bulrush, reddish-

yellow, tallies with the hue of his barred breast. To all intents and purposes he is invisible. There is a quick movement, for he has just caught sight of what he had lost for a time; one rapid motion of the head and neck, and the hawk is on the wing. A little 'cheep!' and you see him fly past with a dead pipit in his claws. We do not stay to fire at him now, for the curlews are heard crying, a sure sign that the tide has turned. The wind has changed, too, from east to north-east, and blows against the tide, sending the salt-drift driving over the flats, and making the eyes run; a blinding salt-drift is not pleasant anyway.

Gaining the foot of the sea-wall, we crouch down for shelter, and listen for the notes of the fowl, driven by the fierce wind off the open sea to seek harbour in the bays and creeks. The curlews are heard above all the rest; then comes the screaming of the red-shanks, the cackle of gulls, and the cry of tern; all combined with the peculiar chatter of thousands of dunlins or oxbirds. The fowl are coming up with the wind, so, crawling up the bank, we peep very cautiously out over the Saltings and down the creek. The whole place is alive with hen and web-footed fowl; about a mile away a line of birds is to be seen coming over from the opposite shore; we get quickly back to the bottom of the wall and wait for them. The whistle

of their wings is first heard, and then we can distinguish them. Widgeon they are, the feathers underneath shine like white satin. Picking out the leader as he passes by, and aiming a yard in front, we bring him down with a thud, dead. And now the fowl are on the Saltings; their scream, chatter, quack, and whistle all mixed up together, while from the other side of the water comes the sound of the heavy duck-guns hard at work. We slip over the wall, and begin to crawl on hands and knees to the fowl feeding on the very edge of the ebb tide. Curlews are not to be thought of; they know exactly how far a gun will reach, and keep just the right distance out of harm's way. Besides, they post one of their number for sentry duty. The redshanks are nearly as bad, for they kick up a noise and let all the other birds know that something is crawling along.

A winged curlew, when he runs screaming and wailing over the ooze, will disturb all the birds for a mile or more. Strange to say, they do not fear the fishing-boats, and, concealed from sight by the nets, the men kill them from the deck as they feed on the edge of the tide. If one drops on the water and goes off with the tide, they have him, for a skiff with oars in her is always in tow. In the autumn the curlews visit the turnip-fields in quest of snails, worms, and

slugs. One of my old friends has frequently shot them before his pointers, as well as the thick-knee, or stone curlew. A large flock of dunlins have settled on the edge of a pool left by the tide, and look pretty little creatures as they run nimbly about, picking up the small things it has left behind it; a few more yards and they will be near enough to hit, but just as the gun is raised to my shoulder, and my finger touches the trigger, I feel myself very gently sinking. The water has undermined the frozen snow and let me through. The hole forms a hiding-place, leaving my head and shoulders free. Pulling myself together, I look first to see that my gun is right, and fire. Five dunlins and three sanderlings to the shot, while one bird flies out to the water's edge and drops. He is not allowed to stop there long, for a grey gull drops down by the side of the bird and swallows him whole. These gulls are continually beating up and down on the ebb and flow; their bills can dig and tear like a raven's. When wounded they will throw up all they have eaten, and fight for their life on a light stomach. They require careful handling; folks not used to them will put them down quicker than they picked them up, and give them the butt-end of the gun on the head for nipping their fingers. These large gulls, the great black-backed, the lesser black-backed, and the

grey or herring-gull are not numerous here. They work up and down singly or in pairs, knowing well how to take care of No. 1. As a rule, they only get shot from the fishing-boats. The common and the black-headed gull are all over ; that is to say, the black-headed gull in winter plumage. The fishermen catch as many as they require with hook and line ; it is like spinning for pike, as the boat sails along. The line is played out with a small fish on the hook, the gull pounces down, and is caught in the upper mandible. The hooks are made of soft iron, so that they bend freely, and beyond the slight touch of the hook the bird is not injured in the least. The fishermen know exactly when to pull, so that the bird shall not swallow the hook. They eat them, after having buried them for twenty-four hours to take the fishy taste out of them. I have known hooded crows shot and treated in the same manner, and a farmer once told me they were as good as his fowls. His farmlands faced the sea, and when the dun crows paid their visits to his fields he would take his old flint-locked fowling-piece down from over the chimney, and bring home a couple. I dined with him many times, but prejudice is strong, and I always declined crow with thanks.

Getting under the shelter of the wall, I made my

way lower down to the tide, where, crouching under the remains of a stack of reeds, I found a 'shore-shooter'—one who makes his living by means of his gun. By some unlucky chance he had forgotten to fill his powder-flask. The birds are well up on the Saltings, and he has only enough for another charge for his duck-gun. Could I oblige him with a charge? he asked.

'Certainly; with half a dozen, if you like,' was my reply.

'I can't afford to shoot them little hen-footed things, he remarked; 'powder and shot cost money. Are you after something to stuff? You seems to have some little things done up careful like.'

'Well, yes; something in that way.'

'Ah, I fancied you was by your shootin'. You let some fowl go by that I should have pulled at. You don't shoot for a livin'?'

'No, I do not.'

'Shall you be down this part any more, think you?'

'Yes, I may, for anything I know.'

'Well, there's some of your sort of birds about here, what you're after, and I could knock a few over for you. Would this one be any good to you? If it is, take it.'

I was glad to have it, for it was a fine specimen of the Kentish plover, or dotterel—a rare bird even here.

'Can you live by your gun?' I asked.

'Sometimes; last winter I did well, though it was by chance like. It come about this way. I had to go to the marshes at the back of the island, Sheerness; you don't know it, do you?'

'I know it well.'

'What, the cliffs and the bays? Well, just out from the cliffs, a sort of cloud was movin' about, and then goin' out of sight for a time. Never in my life had I seen such a lot as that; and by the way they flew I could tell they was black geese.' (Brent geese he meant.) 'Well, I said never a word, but went home and thought about it. Things was lookin' rather glum with me just then, for there was precious little to do. Next mornin' I starts early with my gun and somethin' to eat, and gets there about eight o'clock. You know the place, do you?'

'I know it, a shallow part, covered over with sea grass and weed, and a good nine miles from here.'

'Ah, that's it; the geese was well sheltered there, with plenty of food, and they'd gathered from all parts. I brought home three couple that night and sold 'em. Then I bought myself powder and shot

and a few other things, and went to work. Of course, the farmer what rented the marsh near the place got as many as he liked to have; he lived five miles from there. I used to leave them for him as I passed on the way home at night, and sometimes ducks for a change. There was a rare lot of coots as well; they are good to eat, they are, but they clapper-claw and scratch like cats if they ain't shot dead. Well, all through the winter I managed middlin'; rough work at times, mind you, but I lived, and that's somethin'. Mind your own line of work and keep your tongue between your teeth is the best plan when you drop on a lot of fowl like that. If you let out one half a word, you'll have plenty to help you do the work. My line of work is shootin' fowl, an' I don't want anybody to help me.'

The Kentish plover, he told me, was shot accidentally when he fired at some fowl that had pitched. The wind was blowing a gale when I bade him good-bye; I had my back to it, which was some little comfort.

Presently I heard a little twittering chatter, and some small birds darted past and over the sea-wall into the marsh. There was just light enough to see them as they stood huddled up by the withered flags. I fired my load off at them, and killed two stints.

On my way home, I met the flight-shooters coming down for the night shooting. They carried guns of wonderful make and length, from the very long duck-gun to the short bell-mouthed musquetoon. One would think they had ransacked some old armoury. These are handed down from father to son; many of them have flintlocks. They are regarded with the greatest respect, and their killing power is considered wonderful. If they go off—a thing that is by no means certain—when the trigger is pulled, the men do kill fowl with them; but they never fire at a single bird; they would term that throwing away a charge. To see the way they are wrapped up you would fancy their owners were afraid of their getting the rheumatics or ague—which evils the guns escape, but their owners do not. No man shoots the flats for any length of time without scraping acquaintance with the bailiffs of Marshland —ague and intermittent fever.

A STORM IN THE MARSHES

'THERE'S some hen-footed fowl in the marsh, some of your waders as you call 'em. I see 'em pitch last night when I left the boat. If you want to see 'em you can come down in the skiff with me; or if you'd sooner walk, come through the churchyard on to the downs, for they pitched the Medway side.'

So spoke one of my old fisher friends. I preferred to walk, and passed through the old churchyard under its fine walnut trees, the great branches of which were now bare and leafless; recalling, as I looked at many a name I was once familiar with, some of my companions in the expeditions and adventures of my boyhood. After leaving the churchyard I crossed over a few fields which brought me to the downs—gentle elevations, covered with fine short grass.

The bird life here is represented by magpies in small parties, now chattering and scolding at being disturbed. Besides these are a couple of hooded crows and a few green plovers. From this point a

splendid view is seen ; marsh-lands, sea, and shipping ; green fields and distant woodlands ; whilst right opposite is the Essex coast. From the downs I went straight to the edge of the marsh below, to try and find out where the hen-footed fowl had pitched. The day was bright and warm, even sultry.

And now I am in the marsh, which is covered by countless old mole hillocks, and clumps of rushes, and cut up by pools and dykes ; making my way by a track known only to few, through the swamps to the opposite sea-wall, close to where the Medway reaches the salt water. Little has been seen yet except great hares, which start up from the hillocks where they had squatted ; red, rough-coated creatures, which look like greyhounds as they speed away. Drawing near to a shallow pool of some extent, fringed round the edge with reed and short flag, I crawl along on the ground to inspect it. Something moves the reeds, and out steps the heron—the Jack-ern of the marsh-men—with a cat-like movement ; neck stretched a little forward, he slips away on the look-out for what he can get. Nothing comes much amiss ; eel or flounder, rats, mice, or birds, all comfort his stomach. Catching sight of me as I rise, he gives a hoarse croak and moves off to fresh quarters. Further on, near a clump of rushes in a swamp, a water-rail runs, jerking

his tail; and close by him a spotted crake or rail. They are not alarmed, for no one meddles with them. In the eyes of the marshmen they are worthless hen-footed things. Not many birds have met my view as yet; a mile more and the vegetation begins to change; wild celery, samphire, and sea-kale, or wild cabbage, shows all round about, a sure sign that I am nearing the sea, in fact, close on the sea-wall.

And then I saw a sight which I have seen only once in my life, a sight more often heard of than witnessed, and one to be remembered—namely, a cloud of sea-gulls fishing. The bright sky, and the dancing, sparkling wavelets, the birds, with their pearl-grey and white bodies, as they rose from the water and dipped down again, and their noise of happy clamour, made a scene which was worth going a long way to see. They had found the smelts, and they like good things when they can get them. A pair of ring dotterels tripped along with their family just in front of me—pretty, gentle creatures; they are regarded by the coast dwellers in much the same light as the robin is inland. I have never seen a shot fired at them. They are so trustful as they stand and pipe close beside one. After a good look all round, I turned my back on the sea again to wander over the marshes by a different way.

In that part there are gullies worn by the rush of the tide; well inland they go, forming creeks like railway cuttings, half full of water bayed up at one end. In one of these I expected to find the birds; and I was not disappointed. The cry of the red-shank—'pool snipe' as they call them—comes from a creek with the whistle of the curlew. Crawling to the edge of the gully through the sea-blite, I look over and see curlew, and whimbrel, or Jack curlew, sanderlings, red-shanks, gulls, and other birds feeding, washing, and running about, with the tide coming up. On a post, used for tying boats to, a kingfisher is perched, on the look-out for shrimps and other small things. He is a common bird near the Saltings. Close to my feet is a dabchick, or little grebe, a very common bird here. The salt-water pool he is at work in is clear as crystal. He is up and down, and round about the sides of it, like a little harlequin; he looks to me as if he were flying under the water. Such a gathering of fowl in that part of the marsh I had never seen before. I soon knew the cause of it. Leaving the birds, I made my way over the marsh, for it was well on in the afternoon, past five by my watch. As I passed the weeds a shiver ran through them, making their stems rattle, then all was still. It seemed to grow suddenly gloomy; where did that

puff come from? Looking back seaward, I saw the whole sky in that direction inky in tone, with a coppery glare over it. The water looked black. Against this tone of colouring the war-ships and the dismantled hulks stood out in clear relief, looking like spectre ships. A low growl of thunder, as yet far off, but coming over the sea, a weird flash, and the wind rose. I must seek shelter somewhere, but where is the question, in that wild, wide, and grassy place. At some little distance, a low reed stack, standing between a few pollard willows, catches my eye; and for it I go at my top speed. The cattle have made tracks long before, knowing what was coming. Fortunately for me, it is reached in time, for with a roar the storm sweeps over the marsh. The starlings have just swept over, flying very low, only clearing the ground; and have dashed into the reeds anyhow. The poplars bend and sway, and seem as if they would be torn up by the roots, while the branches of the stunted willows cut and lash like whips, sending the leaves flying. The curlews, driven over the marsh, come shrieking and wailing in doleful fashion. Strong-winged and swift birds at all times, they shoot past now like meteors; while the hooded crows are blown and drifted all over the place. The little hen-footed things are close hid in grass tussocks or

clumps of rushes. Not far from my place of shelter stand two herons, in a little splash sheltered by some willow stumps and rushes; looking very cheerless, their heads drawn on to their shoulders; they know better than to trust to their wings in a storm like this.

With racing speed the homeward-bound fishing-boats are making the creek, the water lashed to foam by the wind, and a fierce high tide running up. With one mighty clap of thunder which seems to shake the whole marsh, and the roar and whistle of wind, the storm passes over, and the evening sun floods with a golden light both land and water. On a molehill a meadow pipit steps and trills his little thanks that the storm has gone by, and one thinks involuntarily of 'the still small voice.'

Leaving my shelter I made then for home, three miles distant. One solitary figure was to be seen, crossing the marsh in a side direction from me. When I overtook it I found it was the friend who had brought me the information about the fowl. He had left his boat safely moored in a snug corner ot the creek.

'Did ye get shelter?' he asked, 'and have ye sin the fowl?'

'Yes, in the back creek.'

'Ah, I fancied you'd see them there. They was on the ooze this morning round about the boats, hollerin' to one another might and main; terrible uneasy they was all the mornin'. I don't like to see 'em like that; there's sure to be something in the wind, and the fowl knows what it is better than we do—leastways that's what I think.'

Like all his class in that fishing village, my friend had an amount of true religious sentiment about him; no cant or humbug, but a manly feeling of veneration for what the Bible taught them. Superstition some would call that now. They gained their living on the waters, and many lost their lives there; and they had family histories and traditions from far-back generations; a class by themselves, they rarely mixed or intermarried with other people.

'Are you goin' back to your new home next week?'

'Yes.'

'You won't forget them hell-hounds. Oh, it was terrible, it was, when them two we know of heard em for the first, and one of 'em for the last time. What are they, think ye? Birds, do ye say? I don't say that they ain't, but they never made that noise that night for nothing; the first time as them two had heard 'em.'

Reaching the sea-wall we left the marsh and walked along the top, which enabled us to look over the saltings and into the creek; the tide now being nearly down. A little distance off, a quarter of a mile it might have been, something was to be seen lying by the water's edge, with some gulls flapping to and fro and cackling over it.

'What can it be?' I asked my companion.

No need for an answer, on getting nearer; we had both seen a drowned man before.

'Stand here, boy,' he says, 'for a minute, while I go to it.'

I stood for a moment and then followed quickly after him.

'Keep back, boy, if you don't want ugly dreams.'

Dreams or no dreams, I looked on the pitiful sight. That poor upturned face! and, alas, it was the face of one of my old school companions. Everything round about me seemed misty just then, I fancied; something got into my eye; anyhow it required a wipe or two.

After a while my companion spoke. 'The waters had his life, they took him away, and now they have brought him back in the storm. His mother will be a bit easier in her mind, poor thing, for she'll know where he lays when they bury him.'

I say nothing. I am out of tune for once.

Talking to himself more than to me, he went on, 'I knowed there was somethin' in the wind, and the fowl knowed it too; when they hollered so, they knowed a body was comin' home in the storm.'

That night, passing down the street to visit a friend, I heard the measured tread of the fishermen coming; and looking back, saw a grave, silent little procession. They were bringing him home; all that was left of her son to his mother.

I followed my poor friend to his grave beneath the walnut trees, and his upturned face comes before me distinctly as I write this, just as it looked when I saw him lying by the water's edge.

HAUNTS OF THE OTTER

A VILLAGE clock strikes four as I stand putting my rod together on an old weir which reaches across the river Mole, a spot noted as a rare place for fish. The water runs quietly over the sloping moss-grown boards, causing that gentle dribbling current in the pool below which all true anglers value; for the fish head up to it in quest of the food which it carries down to them. It is a quaint-looking spot, picturesque in the full sense of the word. The water-wheel is covered with dark-green moss, and the roof of the house and its old walls and woodwork with lichen. It is not a mill, but the point where the water is carried up from a splendid spring close at hand to the mansion of a great estate on the left hand. High banks covered with grand old beech trees rise abruptly from the river. The roots of the trees show like network all over the surface, and they are covered with velvet-like mosses. In front, and reaching right across the river, is a beech which

the water has undermined and the wind blown down. On the opposite side of the river is moist meadow land and alder copse; from that cornfields reach to the foot of Boxhill, and the range of hills which runs the whole length of the beautiful Holmsdale valley.

The vapour is gently lifting from the water, and the sun lights up the tops of the trees with the soft golden light that belongs to early summer mornings only. From the fine old avenue of lime trees which run up to the ruins of the ivy-covered castle, comes the cawing of rooks mingled with the sharp chatter of jackdaws, and now and again the yikeing laugh of the green woodpecker. Across the fields, floating along like a lump of thistledown, comes the barn-owl on his way home to some nook in the ruins. Often, in the days gone by, the pilgrims on their way to the tomb of Thomas à Becket must have paused on the track at the foot of the hills which still bears their name to look over that glorious stretch of woodlands.

The wheel is not yet going. There is a trickle of water from the sluice, which is just what I require. Baiting the line with a well-scoured dew-worm, I gently drop it over some piles that have been driven in to keep a portion of the gravelly bank from being

washed away by the rush of water from the wheel. Twelve feet in depth or more it is here; many a header have I taken into that rush of water, and come up again, otter-fashion, somewhere a long way down. A regular perch-hole this is.

Not a nibble! What can it mean? Impossible to have a better morning; the wind southward, too. Must have a change of bait. Very likely Mr. Pike is there, upsetting the Perch family. Selecting the finest gimp trace, I remove the perch tackle, and then take a bright, lively gudgeon from the bait-can. Temptation in this case will be placed in the way of Mr. Pike, for I intend to spin for him. The cast is made; well spins the bait; once, twice, three times, and never a run. What can be the matter? They may be at the other side of the weir. No sooner thought about than acted on; but I spin and spin there, until, disgusted with my want of luck, the rod is laid on the edge of the weir, and a mild invitation is given to the fish to take the bait when they think fit, and no need to hurry about it.

The angler's consoler, the pipe, is brought out. After a few whiffs, just to compose myself in order to think this matter out, I hear a footstep coming in the direction of the weir, and looking round I recognise one of the oldest workmen in this grand domain.

We have known each other for many years, and his sons have been my companions in many a fishing adventure in all weathers, by night as well as day. His gruff voice is abrupt to a degree, but a kinder heart one would hardly find.

'What luck, my boy?'

'Not a touch of any kind.'

'I don't wonder at it. Now you just look here.' And taking his basket from his shoulder, he drew out the remains of a pike which weighed about five pounds, he said, when captured. The belly and shoulders had been eaten. 'That ain't all; look here!' added he, showing me the tail and head of an eel a good two pounds in weight. 'I found 'em in the medder just above. Them otters have just about harried the water both above and below the weir this last night. It ain't often they do it here. They mostly goes further down or up to fish, and comes back to their home under the bank close to that 'ere big beech what lays across the river; but when they does take it in mind to chivy this 'ere bit o' water, they makes a job of it and no mistake. By what I can track, they ain't come home yet; most likely they've slip through the alders and 'cross the river. If you bide here quiet-like, round that corner by the wheel, you may get a glint of 'em, for they suns

themselves a bit on that beech stam at times. I've sin 'em. My job fur to-day is close handy, so you can come and tell me if they show up. The back-water would be my pitch, if I was you ; that ain't bin worked, I know, for the bream was showin' well up there. Some of 'em looked as big as a pair of bellows. If they ain't much to eat they give good sport, an' I reckon you like that.'

I put my pipe away as a first precaution, for a scent of tobacco will give the alarm at once to wild creatures whether furred or feathered, and then sit down, nearly hidden by the timbers of the weir, keeping very quiet, and my eyes wide open. There is hardly a ripple on the surface by the fallen beech ; the river is deep and narrow here just now. A few days' rain alters the whole look of things, and the now sluggish Mole, pent close by the hills, receives all the water from their sloping sides, and rushes like a mountain torrent over meadows and paths, beside mills and bridges, making many of them impassable for a time. The high banks in some places close to the edge are only held together by the roots of the trees above. You could swim in under the banks and look up at the network of roots and tangled fibre if you are curious that way. There are some uncanny-looking places of the sort. Then, too, you can get a

better notion of the haunts of the otter—that king of fishers.

Once, after being out fishing all day without getting a bite, I came on a nice perch-hole when the fish were on the feed. The water was deep but clear, and my seat on the mossy bank all that could be desired. Visions of a full creel rose before me; at last my patience was to be rewarded; but alas! it was not so, the treacherous bank gave way, and through the roots I shot, rod and all, into that deep perch-hole. I went to the bottom and frightened the perch out of their wits, and, when I came up to the top again, made hurried and wet tracks for home.

Nothing is to be seen yet in the water or on the banks. A flash of bright blue shoots over the water and vanishes in a hole in the bank. It is the kingfisher, who has made his nest in a spot secure from harm.

The bird has taken my attention from the tree in the water for a few moments. There is the otter sitting on the grey trunk in the warm sunlight. He is near enough for me to study his appearance and all his movements well. Like a large cat he looks, which has been thrown in the water and crawled out. Some people think that the fur of the otter throws the water off like the feathers on a duck's back. That is not the case; his fur protects his body in a

different way. Any one who has seen a water-rat come up on a bank after a dive will have a good idea of the general appearance of the otter's fur. Now he gives his coat a shake and combs his fur a bit with his short webbed feet. That powerful tail of his hangs half out of the water, and his head is turned in my direction, looking for the moment just like that of an infuriated tiger in miniature, as, with ears drawn close to his head, he snarls and shows his teeth.

When properly treated the otter is easily converted into an affectionate and playful pet. For those who may not be familiar with him, let me describe his appearance more exactly. He is a trifle larger than a cat, having a very cat-like head, only flatter, which is provided with a fine set of teeth, and he can use them with terrible force for his size. On his lip he has a lot of strong bristles. His eyes are small and have a watchful look about them; the neck is almost as thick as his chest; his body is long and round; the legs are very short, strong, and flexible; the toes webbed for a great part of their length, and the claws on them sharp. The tail is thick at the root and tapers off to a point; it is very powerful, as I said before, and is, in fact, his swimming machine. In colour he is dark brown as a rule, with the sides of his head and throat brownish grey.

He has been sitting in the sunlight whilst I have sketched his portrait, now he thinks he will get a little more into the shade; so, with a peculiar loping gait, he moves further up the trunk and rests by the side of a large limb. Now he shows himself to perfection, and I have managed to slip down on the boards of the weir, where I lie, flat as a flounder, and can study the animal, where an animal shows himself most naturally, in his own home.

There is just a little swell in the water, and his mate shows her head above the surface. She has her feet on the trunk, and is just about to join her lord and master, when a moorhen flies from the meadow into the river, squattering with her feet in the water. That is enough; with one gliding plunge, leaving not a trace on the surface, they are under the bank in their own quarters.

Getting up from my flat posture I pick up my rod and walk into the water-meadows. There I come on my old friend, tackling up a gate.

'Have ye sin anything?' he asks.

'Yes, the pair of them; they are at home.'

'Ah, it's strange, ain't it, that shy things like them should git so near where work's goin' on. Ye see there's only the bank and just a strip o' sward betwixt them an' the work-sheds. Make the most on it, it

ain't more than a dozen yards away, and there's waggins and carts goin' back'ards and forrards most days, and dogs very often with 'em. There's somethin' about that air bit o' gravelly bank as suits 'em, and they wun't budge. My mate clapped a trap down; it warn't baited, ye know; he just sets it under water, only just under, ye know, where they lands, and he had one quick. Well, the other one knowed she was fixed and tried to get her away. They could see by the prints of his feet what he'd bin tryin' at. She was dead when my mate got her out. In the night, when he was comin' home, as he passed by the place he could hear him blowin' and whistlin' for her to come. They're cu'ous outlandish-lookin' creeturs to my eyes, but they're mortal fond o' one another, that I be sure of. Are ye goin' to have a try for any o' they big bream?'

'No; bream are no favourites of mine. You and I will have a chat, and then I will take a stroll through the alders and willow holts to the back of the old ruined castle.'

'Ah,' he replied, 'that was a place once. There ain't such a drive for miles round as that between they lime trees in double rows, what used to go right up to the hall door. The parties as lived there thought a lot of 'em. I've sin the gardeners sweepin'

in it of a mornin', right from the top to the bottom. They did keep a lot o' folks round about 'em, of one sort or another; it was a fust-rate place to go to. I reck'lect goin' there as a youngster an errand for some one, an', as I come away, the butler he sings out to me, "Young man, have you had your ale and somethin' to eat?" "No, sir," says I, "my job didn't take me a minit, an' I never give a thought about anythin' like that." "Come into the kitchen," he sez, "and make the buttons of your weskit tight. Why, man alive, you would bring disgrace on the house if you left it without refreshment." Ay, it was a sight to see the carriages with their lamps lighted come up and down they limes when they'd one o' their gran' dinner parties on. The castle it was always called, I dun know why. There was sore hearts about, I can tell ye, when they gentry went away, and the old squire what bought all this land round about give the order to pull it down; for they was good to all the poor roun'. No one 'd think it was done in my time for to look at it now, covered with ivy, and the trees that have shot up all about it. The order was giv' to pull it down to the first floor, and then leave it. Folks said he done it because he couldn't abide a place like that near his own house; for the castle, mind ye, was a fine place. Anyway, he giv' the

order for it to come down, and another place with it, over the far side of the park, and about the same distance from his house as it was. The people round about didn't hackle to the squire much for having 'em pulled down; for the gentry that lived in 'em was beliked by all. But they was forgot too, after a time, mind ye; and, when all's said an' done, a man can do what he likes with his own. And, oh massey, wasn't that old October what they brewed there real Stingo!

'The old squire's house is reckoned one o' the finest in the country, inside and out. He laid out a mint o' money on it, and they've kept a lot at work ever since the estate came to his hands, and folks, rich people too, come a long way to see the picters and marble figgers in the big hall, what the squire brought from furrin parts. Now he's dead, I fancy changes 'll be comin', and not for the better. I've passed nearly all my life on this estate, an' I don't like new-fangled ways. But they wun't trouble me much, for my sand-glass is nearly run out. I'm getting old and feeble, boy.'

'Have you seen any large pike lately?' I ask him.

His eyes twinkle at the question. 'No; not since they two come to grief. Warn't they big uns? You

wun't forget that one in a hurry. He did look mortal spiteful as he laid there close to the spring. But that charge o' shot in the head settled him, and if one o' the haymaker's rakes hadn't been handy he would a' gi'n us some trouble. Twenty pounds he weighed, if you reck'lect. His teeth was like a dog's more than a fish; he was grand to look at, but no good to eat, for he was dry as a chip. Big fish nor big folks isn't allus the best. Where there's one big un there's mostly sure to be another. Two days after that, mind you, there was a flood. Jim went home the weir way, and on the cart bridge he see another lay, just that minute washed up, for the water was runnin' over the boards. So he took his stick and give him a crack over his noddle to keep the great brute quiet-like, and put him in his basket and brought him home. We found out why the flood washed him on to the boards when we looked down his gullet. He'd got another there of his own sort, that had only just been bolted. That one weighed three pounds good weight. It had half-choked him. He weighed nineteen pounds, he did. They two was a nice pair to have put in a glass case.'

Telling my old friend that I would give him a call in the evening and smoke a pipe with him, I left

him at his work, and entered the swampy alder copse. A few oaks, ashes, willows, and aspens are there; but it is always called the alder copse. The ground here is, as a matter of course, peat bog. The floods have worn great hollows and rifts in all directions; and narrow, shallow streams run through it to fall in the river again farther on. Here and there great tree trunks lie half buried in the bog. All about are grass tussocks, some of them dry and withered, others look green. Clumps of sedge, stiff, and with long sword-like blades, breast-high, bright green in colour, meet you at every few steps. Some caution is necessary in passing through them, for they cut like a knife if the contact is made in a certain direction, as I have often proved to my cost.

Inside this little jungle of aquatic vegetation it is hot and stifling, with a disagreeable moist heat. Very quietly we thread our way through the tangle, treading when we can on the soft dead grass tussocks, and peering through the boughs on either side for some traces of the otter.

A moorhen flits up from a tuft in a little pool, with the usual crippled-leg flight of nesting-time. The young are somewhere about. Close by, on a half-buried alder trunk, steps cautiously a water-rail. Often have I watched the movements of this bird

both in summer and winter. He is the feathered image of caution as he glides in and out. Sometimes you may see him fairly for a full minute ; then again you will only just be able to catch the jerk of his short tail, and to barely distinguish the form of the bird. As a rule it is the tail that you see most of, for he is off like a flash at the least movement on your part.

Proceeding with great caution, we come to a more open part of the copse. The water-runs from the river have formed a shallow pool here, over which a large alder has fallen, years ago, and gone to decay. It is hollowed out to a mere shell in some parts, and from the decayed portion tufts of sword-grass have sprung up in bunches, and droop heavily over, the tips of the blades touching the shallow water.

Here is a bit for a painter—a glimpse of blue sky, the play of light and shade on the alders round the pool, the dark trunk of the old tree gone to decay brightened up by the green tufts, and the reflections on the smooth surface of the water. And there, close to the edge of the pool, under the trunk, is the impression, the seal of the otter. He shows a refined taste in all his habits of living. When he takes his rambles, it is in pleasant places by the river and in it, and by woodland meadow and stream. Less refined

creatures can dine on what he leaves on the banks. This copse is one of their roads and playgrounds. But for one drawback one could stay here for a long time; at every step one takes swarms of midges rise up and give one notice to quit by stinging severely. It soon becomes torment unbearable, so without any more cautious stepping, I dash into the meadow and bathe hands and face to relieve my wounded feelings.

Gently jogging on after this through one or two meadows, and skirting the edge of the willow holts, I reach a portion of bog meadow. On the edge of this, close to the river, is a clump of bush cover mixed up with rough clumps of rushes. Through this runs a spout—in other words, a disused bog-land drain. Some old decayed posts and rails, covered with moss and lichen, are scattered about the entrance to the spout. The meadow is dotted about with yellow iris, and the golden flowers of the kingcup blaze out from their cool-looking rich green leaves. Other flowers there are, but the irises and the kingcups stand out from all. Some grand oaks stand close to the water's edge, and some which have been felled and barked in the spring lie close to them, making a good foreground. The midges fortunately are not present here.

Now for a pipe and some reflection on the ways and means of living—also on the so-called instinct of animals. How the closet naturalist, who pores over dried skins and preserved specimens, takes refuge in that term *instinct*! From my earliest childhood I have had some one creature or another for a companion; they have taught me much, and will teach me yet more I trust. By carefully studying their needs and inclinations, one is well rewarded with their confidence and affection.

I am roused from my day-dreams by a whining cry, something like the whining of a young pup. It comes from the old drain. I leave my seat on the tree trunk; and my hat quickly off, I peer over the butt of the tree, my eyes fixed on the spot whence the sound comes. Again the cry is repeated; now it is louder, and the cause of it is soon apparent; for from under the old rails comes a full-grown otter, not wet this time. Her coat shines in the sun. The cry sounds again. She bends her head down low for a moment. When she raises it she has a cub not quite half grown in her mouth. Holding it as a cat would a kitten, she places it on the grass, where it begins at once to skylark with its mother's tail. Once more the action is repeated with another cub. Then the mother and her young play in the sun like a cat with

her kittens. It might be long before one came upon such a sight as that again.

Suddenly a shot is heard coming from some place of concealment near at hand. One cub falls over on his back, dead, with his feet drawn up as if still at play, shot through the heart. Mother otter knows that sound, she has heard it before, but to the little ones it is new ; and the other one thinks the brother is only at his gambols, and plays about round him ; the mother grips him by the nape of the neck, but it is in vain, for out from the cover runs a man. Only when he rushes at her and raises his gun to strike her with the butt-end does she let go her hold and dash into the river. The poor little cubs had never seen a human being before, and the remaining one does not attempt to bite when his captor picks him up ; he only cries most piteously for his mother. The whole proceeding is distasteful to me, but I must not say so, as I am only here on sufferance, the other by right.

'I'll have her! see if I don't, before many minutes are over.' Taking a piece of string from his pocket he ties it round the cub's neck, and tethers the poor little animal to a peg in the ground. 'You come this way into the bushes.'

Left to himself, the cub gives free vent to his

sorrow. 'Look! see that plough-up of the water, just under; she's heard him and is coming fast,' whispers the man.

With a rush, she shoots from the river to the meadow, and is at once shot. Her love for her cubs has cost her her life.

'They will make a good case for the House when they are set up, won't they?'

'Set up,' indeed! No doubt they will. Any talk of setting up and stuffing of wild creatures generally gets my dander up. It takes a man that is familiar with the animal in its native haunts, and an artist to boot, to make the poor dead things look natural and lifelike.

'How do you account for the number of otters about here?' I ask the man presently.

'Why, this way. They have always been about the river, but not just in this part till late years. You see, before the old squire died there was a good lot of keepers and lookers-out, for he kept up a good head of game. So if an otter come down here, he had a hot time of it. Some of the gentry up the river that had ponds on their lawns, with gold-fish in them, knowed they was about, for though there was plenty for 'em in the river they would come out of it and get the gold-fish. The old squire's going off made a great

difference ; the family went abroad, or somewhere away, after his death, and things went on very quiet for years. The establishment was mostly closed. The game was killed off and no more reared, and the keepers found fresh places. The principal hands on the estate just give an eye to things to see that no mischief was done. Well, the otters found out they could come here without being harried about, and back they come with a vengeance. You see, for one thing, there's cover for 'em. All the sides of the banks are undermined and matted with the tree roots, and the water is very deep. If they had otter hounds they would be of no use here, for fifteen or twenty feet of water in places, and a long stretch of it, to say nothing of the network of big roots, would break the hearts of the best pack in England. It's wonderful the distance they'll run at times—their holes, I mean. Rabbits work the banks in all directions ; then, when the otter finds a spot that suits him, he gives the rabbits notice to quit in his own fashion. It wants little altering to make his home ready for him.'

'Ay, he's pretty cute.'

'You know that gravelly bank yonder? Well, one flood-time we was hunting the rats that the water had drove out. It had drove the rabbits too, but it was rats we was hunting. We had got the ferrets and the

dogs. The ferrets worked well, and went into all the holes as free as rain, till we come to a couple on the top of that particular bank. We turned 'em down, but they wouldn't work them. All they did was to just poke their noses in and sniff, and then run round the holes, uneasy like. The dogs, too, sniffed and scratched about strange like for them, quieter than they was used. We jumped about and poked into the holes, wondering why the ferrets would not go in. The river was rushing almost bank-high to where we stood; when all at once something was heard whining like, and somebody said, "Look at that!" It was a sight! for in the river was a fine otter. She had her cub by the nape of the neck, and was swimming across with him. It was hard work, but she tore through that rush of water from the weir in fine style. There was nothing above water but the alder stems on the other side, and she made for them. She was not twenty yards away from us the whole time. Well, when she reached them, she got her cub on to a limb and left him. He did cry. And then we lost sight of her for a bit. The whine come again, almost close to our feet, and the dogs stood with ears pricked up and one fore-foot lifted, just quivering with excitement. She dashes out from the bank with a second cub. The dogs rush to the water's edge, but they

dare not plunge in, plucky as they are; for they knowed they'd be washed down and dashed into the limbs of the fallen trees that lay in and across the river. She got him over all right, and then they three made for the alder copse. That's how I come to know the distance they'll lay up in a bank.'

'Had you a gun with you?'

'No; and if I had, it should never have gone to my shoulder to fire at her, when she'd been so plucky like. It 'd just have seemed like murder to me, for all I killed them two just now. But you see it's like this; the head uns walk round and see some of their leavings on the ground, and make a bit of a fuss about it; for some of 'em are fond of fishing. So just to keep matters quiet, you must know, I'm obliged to settle one or two when I have the chance. I don't want to brag about my shootin', but if I do get a fair sight at 'em they don't suffer much, for I always use a cartridge. As far as myself is concerned, I should never meddle with 'em; but, you see, where there's more 'an one master to please, you must mind your P's and Q's, as they say.'

'Just so, my friend; that is the philosophical way of looking at things.'

He smiles, and bids me good-day. We have had many a chat together, he and I, before this.

When the harvest-moon floods the river and trees with light, and his day's fishing is over, the otter plays about in the meadows bordering the river-side to his heart's content. Where the steep sides of the hill—called the Whites—shoot down to the river, he is at home. Gnarled roots and fallen trees find him a safe refuge. The hill-side is claimed by the fox and badger, but the river is the domain of the otter; he holds his own there, and is likely to do for many a day to come.

THE BADGER

OF the few animals which now inhabit the woods and the hill-sides, perhaps the badger is the least known to the general public. He is nocturnal, in the first place; and his colouring, being in broken tones, does not readily arrest the eye. His head, chin, and neck are white, with brownish-black bands running on either side from the nose over the eyes and ears. His upper parts are light grey sprinkled with black, the lower parts brownish-black; his fore-feet are long and stout, his limbs muscular, his jaw powerful, and his teeth sharp; in fact, he is well set up as far as these formidable weapons are concerned. The usual length of the animal is a little over three feet, but in his family, as well as in the human race, there are large and small individuals. Take his general appearance as he jogs along, and a small bear is at once suggested to your mind. Many of his ways, too, are bear-like; he will lie up in the winter, and eat vegetable as well as animal food. Some other

creatures, that are supposed to be strictly carnivorous, will eat fruit when they can get it.

The badger, poor beast! is getting scarce; more's the pity, from the animal collector's and the naturalist's point of view. He generally manages to dispense with the observation of the latter; for, unless his ways are well known, he will escape from a place that might have been supposed strong enough to hold a rhinoceros. All his family have been excavators from the beginning, on the most scientific principles. Unless you take the greatest possible precautions, he will dig himself out and get away in quick time. He is a most quiet and orderly being, and a contented one too, if let alone; for, as a rule, he is fat.

His persecutors are many, from the keeper down to the rat-catcher's lad, who boasts that he has 'the best dog at any varmint as ever run on four legs.' Some of our common expressions require alteration, being founded on ignorance. For instance, folks say, 'Dirty as a badger'; whereas a cleaner creature in its home and surroundings would be hard to find. A very wide-awake individual he is; and he need be, for the hand of both man and of boy is against him, and utterly without reason.

If the badger had but the same privileges ex-

tended to him that the fox has, he would not be so rare an animal as he is now. Why should he be so worried by dogs? It is to he hoped that badger-drawing has nearly had its day. This very practice, brutal as it is, testifies to his determined courage and fighting qualities; you could not find a more determined antagonist than he is when on his mettle.

With regard to his food, the greater part of it consists of such small deer as may fall in his way, when he wanders here and there in the evening after leaving the hole where he has lain dormant all the day. That long snout of his will poke and root out all manner of things, from a wild bees' nest to a field-mouse. He will eat young rabbits when he can get them, and old ones do not come amiss to him when the chance offers. A sporting character I knew once, procured a fine badger for the express purpose of having him baited by all the fancy dogs in his locality. Amongst other creatures he kept rabbits, and his particular fancy was to have the very best of the lop-eared variety that could be procured. One doe he valued most highly, because, setting aside her own qualities, she had a fine lot of young ones, well-grown, and as beautiful as herself.

The badger had only been caught the same evening on which it was brought to this individual.

Not having a place ready for it, he placed it for the time in an empty hutch just over the one in which his favourite doe and her little ones were. Fastening the door securely, he left the animal to his own devices for the night, little thinking what these might be. Next morning he found, to his horror, that the badger had torn up the floor of the hutch where he had been placed, and got into that of the doe, where he had slaughtered the whole family. Their bodies lay dead there, the badger curled up in the middle of them, fast asleep, and very full of rabbit. His first impulse was to kill the beast, there and then, but on thinking it over he remembered that he had paid a considerable figure for it ; so he got the badger out and sold him to one of his friends as a pet, telling him that it was 'quite harmless, would live on bread and milk, and in a very short time would follow him about like a dog.' Very soon, indeed, he was requested by this friend to take him back again, but he refused.

I will describe one of his homes, which I have visited many times. At the bottom of a glade, by the side of the chalk hill, is a dip or hollow, not deep, but a kind of basin about twice the size of one of my living-rooms. Round this, old beeches, growing close by, have pushed forth their great roots in all directions ; on one side of the hollow a gnarled oak stands,

not any great height, but of vast bulk, the great limbs reaching far over the open space. In the middle of the hollow, under the roots of this oak, our "friar of orders grey" has made his home, and a very secure and pleasant one it is.

When the moon is high up in the sky, and throws a soft silvery blue tone on the tops of the firs which line the side of the glade, the glade itself showing like a bright blue-green stripe, and nothing is heard but the jar of the fern-owl as he flits over the glade, or the drone of some beetle as he flies along, then is the time for our friend the badger to come out and see how the world looks in the moonlight.

He has left his hole, and there he stands in the full light of the moon, the great limbs of the oak throwing chequered shadows around him on the greensward and on the exposed surface of the chalk here and there. The greater portion of the sides of the hollow nearest his home is covered with foxgloves and trailing bramble. He looks round about him for a few seconds, and sniffs, just to find out if anything peculiar is in the air ; then, finding matters all right, as he thinks, he gives himself a scratch or two and a good shake, and deliberately waddles off to get something to eat ; a very easy matter at this time of the year, for on a warm summer night all kinds of

creatures are about, and he makes their acquaintance much to his own satisfaction, if not to theirs.

Little does he think that he is wanted on this particular evening. Whilst he goes plodding along, picking up a little bit here and there, the keeper and his lad are holding some conversation about him. I happen to come across them; my sympathies are with the badger, but it is not my business to interfere.

'Have ye got the bag and sack, Jim? If ye have, jest make yer way, quiet-like, over t'other hill, an' cum down the side on it—on the quiet, mind; fix yer bag, an' when 'tis done, give three hoots, one arter t'other, to let me know as things is all right; ye minds what I tell ye; I'm goin' back to get Ginger an' Nipper. They'll hussle him up, an' no mistake. They ain't big uns, but better tarriers than what they be never cum inter this 'ere wurld. Now then, off ye goes, an' before ye gits yer job done I shall be near to ye, fur to hear ye hoot: he's sartin sure to be on the ramble.'

Arriving at the spot, Jim produces the bag, or rather a small sack, from his jacket pocket, and places it in the entrance to the badger's burrow in such a way that should the animal rush for home, as he generally does when alarmed, he will go right into it. The string that runs round the mouth of the sack will

be pulled tight by the force of his rush, and there he will be like a pig in a poke. The string of the bag is secured, of course, to a peg. Having arranged all this to his own satisfaction, Jim picks up the large sack—he had two, a large and a small—walks out of the hollow on to the moonlit greensward, and hoots like a brown owl, three times. After this musical effort he stands quite still, and listens intently, but for some time the humming jar of the fern-owl, chur-chur-er-er-er-er-chur, is the only sound that reaches his ear. Suddenly he places his empty sack on the ground beside him, and is on the alert, for a sound of quickly moving feet at a distance makes itself heard. He knows what that means: Ginger and Nipper are close on the badger's track; and like the well-bred, well-trained little fox terriers that they are, they run him mute, save for the mere ghost of a whimper now and again, just enough to show they are eager to close with the poor beast.

That, however, is far from the keeper's intention; he would not let his two little beauties, game though they are, close with such a desperate antagonist as an old dog badger, if he could help it; for he knows well enough that dogs and badger would fight to the death. His plan is that they shall drive him to his burrow, and into the sack.

The best laid plans do not succeed always, however, as is proved in this case. Nearer and nearer comes the sound of pattering feet at full speed, and behind that the heavy tread of a man who is putting his best foot foremost. Nearer they come; they will break into the moonlight in another moment; we can hear them pant, for they have run him through the cover at top speed. The lad is ready to dash down into the hollow—in fact, he has already moved to do so, when the sound of running feet stops dead; and then, in the thicket, a desperate tearing scuffle is heard going on, for Ginger and Nipper have run into and closed with him before he could reach home.

The sounds make Jim wild with excitement, and he shouts his loudest to the keeper, who is now close at hand and puffing like a steam-engine with running so hard.

'Can't ye git a badger in a sack without hollerin' like murder?' he asks angrily. 'I'm a good mind——'

What he'd a good mind to did not transpire, for the boy yelled out, 'I ain't got him; they'se got him; don't ye hear 'em worryin' of him?'

Making use of some very strong expressions, such as he would not make use of at a chapel tea-meeting, the keeper dashes into the thicket, followed by Jim;

quickly they reach the spot, where they see a confused mass of living matter, turning and twisting, growling, whining and snapping, at their feet.

'I'll murder ye, you old varmint! Look out, Jim! Cuss an' hang him! I can't git a stroke at him! Why the—— here they are; what's up now? Ginger! Ginger! loose him! Ginger! he'll rip ye up in bits. Let me smash him!'

'Here he is; hold hard, master! ye nearly had 'im; hold hard!'

'Well, if ever I take my tarriers! Oh dear! oh dear! if there ain't Nipper; he's done for. Hold him, Jim; don't ye let him out o' yer arms, fur mercy sake. Now then, here they are; now fur it, one way or t'other. This is the wust night's work as ever I come across. Jim! Jim! where be ye?'

'In this 'ere tangle; I'm comin' fast as I can.'

'Have ye got Nipper?'

'Yes, I got un.'

'He's a dunner, ain't he?'

'No, he ain't; it's tight work fur me to hold him!'

'Don't ye let him go; here they be, dead as herrin's! Oh dear, Ginger! if I ain't wound up clean! Never agin will I see your feller. If it waunt fur the shame on it, I could fairly beller! I be cut up, an' no mistake.'

'Pick him up, master; you'll hev to loose his holt, for dead as he be he's got him under the ear. This 'ere night's work about winds my pig up, I can tell ye.'

Picking Ginger up, and holding him in his arms, the keeper stood in silence. Presently a slight movement took place in the body of the terrier, and with a low whimper and one long-drawn breath he opened his eyes, and then licked the face of his master.

'Jim! hoora! houra! Ginger's alive; oh, my precious Ginger! oh, ain't you tore about! Give us Nipper, an' shove that cusnation warmint in the sack an' let's git back fur to doctor these 'ere poor things. We'll git 'em round, if 'tis to be done.—Look 'ere, Jim, did ye ever? they ain't hurt much; they're tryin' their werry hardest ter get out o' my hands ter hev another go at him! I don't think as there's sich another pair o' tarriers as these 'ere two, no, not nowheres: there can't be! Ye've got that murderin' warmint?'

'Yes, he's in the sack.'

'Then look sharp! we'll cut out o' this; come on! an' next time as master wants a badger fur one o' his friends, somebody else's tarriers 'll hev to drive un. The fust one as we got out was that old warmint's missus an' her cubs. That was a diggin' job, as we

wunt forgit in a hurry; 'twas desprit work. But this 'ere bit o' business sets that aside clean. Jim! what are ye sniggerin' about? what's in the wind now, ticklin' yer fancy that way?

'Oh, nuthin' pertickler. Is Ginger and Nipper quiet?'

'No, they ain't; I thinks as they'd like ter fall foul o' that 'ere sack.'

'Well, I dessay they wud; for this 'ere warmint has cum round agin, an' is tearin' an' scratchin' like mad. It do take a lot to wind a badger's clock up, that it do!'

'Jim, when we've sin to the dogs, you come up an' hev a pint o' the best cider.'

THE FOX

I FEEL it almost presumptuous on my part to say anything about that wonderful animal the fox. So much has been written and said about him, both by sportsmen and some of the greatest of our literary geniuses. My account of him will be brief; not having the fox-hunter's feeling of veneration for him nor the hatred natural to the poultry-keeper, my views will at any rate not be one-sided. Nor have I ever had the least wish to possess Master Reynard embalmed as a mummy, or to see the wily gentleman in a glass case, lean and hungry-looking, with squinting cunning in his eye. He is known to me as a clean, swift, strong, and handsome creature, full of courage. He is also universally credited with a very large amount of intellectual power, although it is always said to be employed exclusively for his own benefit. To call an individual of the human family an old fox is certainly not a compliment, for it implies that he is crafty and selfish.

His usual length is four feet, but he varies in size according to food and locality. In the Highlands of Scotland he is *almost* like a wolf in size and strength; and he is not regarded in the same light as in England, for he is shot down without the least compunction there. The proper place to see all wild animals to advantage is in their own home. May I be allowed to say that, in this respect, they are unlike many individuals of the human species?

It is just after four o'clock on a soft May morning, and the sun lights up the tops of the trees, bringing the tender foliage out in sparkling relief against the hill-sides. At the foot of the one nearest us Reynard and his vixen partner have their home. Numbers of fine beeches grow here; the chalky soil is well suited to them. A large one has been blown down at some time, but it has been sawn from the roots long ago. For a long distance the soil was loosened in its fall, and Reynard has taken advantage of this to form an earth for himself and family among the loosened chalk, stones, and old tangled roots. The surface round about is covered with the finest and greenest turf. Many hawthorn bushes are there, giving out their delightful fragrance to perfection, for the morning is warm. On the end of a long beech bough, which reaches far out over the earth, a cuckoo

sits, and flirts his tail about, shouting 'Cuckoo! Cuckoo!' The entrance to the earth and a small space about it is bare, for the little foxes are playful animals, and are at high jinks often, capering about. At present they are, comparatively speaking, quiet, for all their bellies are full. Father Reynard is sitting in the bright warm sunlight, winking in a most knowing manner, while two of his cubs play with his bushy tail to their heart's content, tossing it from one side to the other in a most comical fashion. Mother vixen has a rabbit in her mouth, which she tosses up and catches, and then lets drop for one of the young ones to nibble at its ears, while the darling of the family torments a poor frog that has found his way there. The whole lot look as though they had a touch of dropsy, their bellies stick out so. The feathers and feet of pheasants strew the ground, and other remnants, for Reynard's motto is, 'Other creatures' young ones can cry for food if they let 'em; but mine don't, if I know it.'

At some distance the alarm note of a blackbird sounds. Reynard opens his eyes, pricks his ears, and the cubs leave off playing with his tail. The next moment a jay squeaks out, and comes flying overhead. That is enough; he is up on his feet, ears erected, eyes gleaming, and his brush held almost in a line

with his back, his fore feet well to the front, the hind ones on the spring. Squeak! squeak! and another jay flits past. With a rush the cubs dash to earth, followed more leisurely by their worthy parents. The cause of their stampede is soon explained, for up the side of the wooded slope a man is seen coming; it is the keeper on his early round.

Reynard is very accommodating as to his food; nothing nice comes amiss to him: game of all kinds, furred and feathered; fish, when he can get the run of them in spawning time, when they are on the sides of the shallows; field-mice, and his especial dainty, a well-fed barn rat. There is no lack of these in the harvest time, and up to the commencement of the winter months. Then they troop back to their old quarters for the cold season. He has a taste for poultry; ducks he values most highly. Perhaps no one but a miller would expect to find a fox in a swamp; but he knows his tricks and likings, and though he curses him most heartily, yet lets him go free, for is he not St. Reynard? The miller's landlord hunts him in the orthodox manner.

On the tussocks, covered with flag and rush spread all over the swamp, the fox makes a most comfortable retreat. Getting into the middle of one, he twists himself round and round, dog fashion, and

there he lies on a nice bed, soft and dry, completely hidden from view, remaining there until the miller informs his landlord's keeper that a fox is there ; then the huntsman comes round—and the sooner he does this the better, or there will not be a duck left on the pond.

Reynard can hear them nozzling and softly quacking at the edge of his hiding-place ; with cat-like steps he creeps closer, looking through the flags. When he finds that he is near enough for a jump, there is a splash, and one low quack and the drake is in his mouth. In pictures you may see him represented with his quarry slung over his back. This is not correct ; he carries what he has caught in front of him, like a retriever. More than once, when in search of wading birds, have I come on the retreats of the fox and the otter very near to each other. For cool impudence match him if you can. I have known a dog fox, when the vixen had the care of a family, enter the yard of the keeper's house, take one of his game hens from under his living-room windows, march off with it across the road and to his home, give it to his family, and then come back for another. A pointer was in the yard at the time, chained to his kennel. Driven off at his second visit, he coolly re-crossed the road to the turf, squatted on his haunches there, and

looked over at the yard, and the game hens used for hatching out the pheasants' eggs. It was too much for the keeper to put up with. Slipping a cartridge into his gun, he swung it up to his shoulder and let drive at the fox, saying, 'there's notice to quit, you thund'rin' sweep!' Then did Master Reynard play some extraordinary antics. First he jumped off the ground several times in the most lively manner, then he cuffed his ears vigorously with his fore-feet, gave a bit of a yelp, and bolted at top speed. His skin is thick, and what would knock other things over would not cripple him.

When the hunters and the hounds chevy him across the fields honest farmer Giles complains most bitterly. 'Dash my old gaiters, if I doan't wish as every warmint of a fox as ever run was cold and stiff, that I do; an' 'tis a pity as some folks ain't got better work for their hosses than ridin' over other people's craps an' breakin' fences an' gates. 'Tis wonderful what a likin' most of 'em have fur blunderin' thru a fence an' knockin' the padlock off a gate. Why doan't they jump over 'em? ef their hearts was as big as their hosses hap they wud. That there field of turmits will be punched inter sheep feed, they wunt want to go inter no cuttin' machine. Cuss all fox huntin', I sez; 'tis ruin for farmers!'

It was wonderful how quickly Farmer Giles was brought to modify these strong opinions on fox-hunting by the appearance of a two-gallon bottle labelled Old Irish, 'with the Hunt's compliments.' He uncorked the bottle, smelt and tasted it more than once, with and without sugar, ejaculating between each sip, 'Massy, oh alive!' Then he walked to those fields again over which they had ridden. Could it have been the softening influence of the Old Irish, or had he been making mountains out of molehills? for when he got back he told his 'missus,' with a beaming smile of benevolence on his face, that, 'Raly, considerin' the lot o' gentlemen as 'ad rid over the craps, the little harm as he cum across waunt wuth speakin' on.'

THE HERON AND ITS HAUNTS

THE heron—the Jack Hern of the marsh-men—was at one time a common bird in those localities which were suited to that bird's habits and means of living. His being a notable figure in history has been, and is still, a disadvantage to him, for he has suffered from an ill reputation which clings to him to this day, but which he only gained through being misunderstood. His appearance and bearing are remarkable, and have always commanded attention. Hungry as a heron, lean as a heron, long-shanked as a heron, are common expressions with people who do not take the trouble to investigate his character more closely. Much has been written about him from an able and a more scientific point of view than I care to take here, but a great deal of nonsense also. One author, speaking of the heron and his habits, calls him 'a picture of wretchedness, anxiety, and indigence, condemned to struggle perpetually with misery and want; and sickened by the cravings of a famished

appetite.' Fine sounding words these, but there is no sense in them. Such a description is noways applicable to my old acquaintance, the common grey heron. He is a bird of many qualities, patient, strong, and brave. Very rarely does he put himself in a temper; when he indulges in that luxury it is the same with him as with some people who are usually quiet, and the further you get away from him the better.

But why men and boys should rush for a gun to shoot him down as though he were some dangerous animal I cannot tell. That mark of attention has been paid him for successive ages; but in the olden time only the great could deal with him, as he was then in grace of sanctuary. The monks might grumble when they saw him round their fish-stews, but they were compelled to let him be. A cast of jerfalcons or peregrines used to bring him to earth, and then the falconer had to be quick to prevent mischief, for, if his neck was free, that long bill would be used with deadly effect, and his claws would clutch like a cat's. When living he was held in the highest estimation, and when dead also. For the heron, and his near neighbour and kinsman, the bittern, graced the abbot's table as well as that of the nobility. A royal bird of those days one might style him, for

royalty itself framed laws for his protection and special benefit.

Even now they will kill him for eating in the wild marsh-lands when they can get him. I have seen him hanging up in the poulterers' shops for sale as an article of diet. He commands a good price in some places. A clean feeder he is, and his food is fresh, for he has it alive.

From my childhood I have known the bird well, and all his habits and characteristics. With an inborn passionate love for all wild creatures, I was left as a boy to my own devices in that wild marsh-land district which I have already written about; and I knew practically as much about the birds that frequented our shore then as I do now. My knowledge was gained by wading through reeds, crawling between hillocks, lying flat and wriggling like an eel, to watch the waders and gulls feed and wash in the pools from morning to night. A lonely boy, I tried to scrape acquaintance with the creatures about me, and it grew to be the delight and pastime of my youth, and the interest and pleasure of maturer years.

Jack Hern, as I called him then, is a bird of sober-coloured plumage, grey, black, and white. The bill has a yellow tint, and the legs are a dull light

olive-green. These tones are so disposed, however, that the eye is satisfied. Every one who has studied birds and animals in their haunts must have noted how the colouring of the creatures harmonises with their surroundings. So much the better for them.

I have studied him in many different places since my boyhood—on the moorlands, by river and stream, in the meadows and ploughed fields ; among the lush tangled herbage of a bog swamp, and in the trees ; and my affection for the heron has strengthened with my knowledge of him and his ways.

Let us observe him where I knew him first. Morning, noon, and night, according to the flow and ebb of the tide, you will find him on the sea-shore. Speaking from my own experience, the herons are more numerous there in winter than in summer. The parts of the shore close to the marshes left bare by the tide are singularly lonely. The sun shines hotly on the dreary flats, and the pools flash and glitter. With the exception of a pair of Ring Dotterels piping about, not another sound is to be heard. The hot air quivers over the flats and saltings ; not even a gull is to be seen, for they are having a rest by some shallow pool, clear as crystal, in the marshes near at hand. Mud flats and pools mingle together in a blue flickering haze in the distance. There is no life

overhead, but you will find plenty close to your feet. The mud flats here are hard slub ; you can walk over them without fear of quags to swallow you up to the knees, and deeper, unless you throw yourselves backwards and scratch out somehow. Winkles are all over the place, crawling slowly like snails, and leaving their tracks behind them. Here is a pool left by the tide ; so clear the water is that the most minute crab or fish can be distinctly seen. What a collection of creatures dart about hither and thither as we lift up a mass of snapper-weed in the pool : small fish of various kinds, the greater part young plaice and flounders, with the common green crab of the saltings, from the little nippers no larger than a shilling to those near the size of your closed fist, which congregate in hosts, thousands upon thousands of them, in some parts of our coasts. Some would imagine it to be a wild-goose chase coming to look for the heron on these bare, hot, steaming flats, but we have found him here before, and shall do so now.

Mussel scalps, as they are called, abound here.

There is a fitness in local terms which strikes one more forcibly than pleasantly, as you would find if your bare shins were to scrape an acquaintance with the sharp edges of the shells, which cut like knives. These scalps vary in height from that of a gallon

to a bushel measure. Advancing with slow steps between them and the pools, we startle a heron from behind one of the larger ones. Up he springs, with rough, croaking scream, and flaps away with a lazy flight, for his stomach is full, and he has been disturbed from a nap in the shade of the mussel scalps. Presently another rises, with a small eel about a foot long wriggling about in his bill, and this gives the alarm to a couple more who were near at hand. It would seem strange to a casual observer that so large a bird could escape notice on the bare flats, but the reason he so often does so—and they are rarely seen until you get close to them—is that the slub is grey in tone of colouring, also the white breast of the bird falls in with the bright flash of the pools lit up in the sunlight; one is blended into the other, and the instinct of self-preservation, which is very fully developed in him, saves him often from harm. Like the rook, he has some means of knowing if it is a gun you are carrying, or merely a stick. I have proved this to be so, over and over again I cannot account for it in any way, but the fact remains: if you point a stick at him in gun fashion, he does not mind it in the least; but a gun presented is the instant signal for speedy flight.

Like other living creatures, he finds change

necessary to him at times, and he quits the marshes for the sea-shore at his own time and pleasure. He finds the pools about the right depth for wading, and altogether convenient; for, as a rule, they are merely depressions in the slub, a few inches deep. The flounder may scuttle down, leaving only his head and eyes exposed, the head slightly raised, looking more like the head of the cobra than anything else in nature. What curious likenesses we find at times in creatures whose mode of life is so utterly different! Well hidden as Mr. Flounder thinks himself, it is not enough, for Jack Hern's quick eye has seen him. The bird's neck is drawn back for one moment, and the stroke is made. Far better than any large fork lashed on to a stick is the bill of the heron. The fish may kick and wriggle as only a flounder can, but he will not get away from that grip. This victim is some three inches in width; watch it in the process of disappearance. The fish is tossed up and caught head foremost, and he gulps him down as far as his neck. That is long and thin, but its power of expansion is very great. The passage of the fish can be plainly seen, for the neck becomes fan-shaped where the fish sticks for a moment on its way to the bird's stomach. However, the matter is soon over, as the fish folds in on both sides, and the devourer is ready

to repeat the process with something else. Small tender crab, shrimp, prawn, or sand-hopper, also sand-worms, and many more little pickings are there for him. He lives well in summer, but he does not get fat any more than the great marsh-hares that often sit up and look at him as he prowls about, especially when the tiny leverets are located in some slight hollow between the mole hillocks. Fat is not found on either them or him—not in the proper sense of the word.

Let us have a good look at him after he has been shot, dead; certainly not till we are sure of that fact, for I have a profound respect for the fighting capabilities of the heron. Falcons, hawks, and owls can use their bills and claws with effect—I can speak feelingly on that subject—but I would rather deal with the three of them together than with Master Heron when he is only wing-tipped by the shot and his temper is roused.

There he is dead at our feet, however. Pick him up and examine him. Begin with his dagger of a bill; it is six inches long. Feel the tip and its serrated edges. Look at the gape he has. Pass your hand down his neck to the shoulders; there is muscle there. Press the eyelids back with the finger tip and look at his keen hawk-like eye. Notice the bend of

the wing from the shoulder, and feel the muscles that move his broad wings in flight. Grand wings they are. Take the tip of one flight feather and stretch the wings; or, better still, hold them out in front of you with both hands. You will be surprised at their length and width. Now finish with his legs and feet. Wonderful feet they are, and the same may be said of the other members of his tribe. Surely the stilts of the marsh-men, with the flat pieces at the ends to prevent their sinking and sticking in the soft surface of the marshes, had their origin in the first instance in a close examination of the heron's legs and feet. Feel his long toes. How lithe they are! You can bend them at your will, up and down and sideways. So could the bird when alive, and in twenty different directions to your one; for he could climb and cling to anything with them, perch on trees, step about as gingerly as a cat, wade anywhere, and, when he thought fit, swim also. He is a bird of varied accomplishments, and they are all useful to him, serving his purpose each one in its turn, which is more than can be said of the accomplishments of some members of the human family.

Take him for all in all, he is a feathered Moss-Trooper. Luxuriously as he fares in summer, in winter the tune is changed. No more lazy flappings

over the marsh from pool to pool, and from one dyke to another through an atmosphere bathed in the soft, hazy, golden light of sunset—bird and sky, land and water, alike glorified in its long slanting rays. How often have I gazed on such a scene in my old marsh-land home! A few more years and it will be a rarer sight; for the marshes have been drained in many counties, and where the heron had his home you will soon see cornfields and fruit orchards.

Winter has come, but no snow has fallen yet; the air is too cold for it to come down. Marsh and dykes are frozen hard; the keen winds from the sea cut bitterly, making the reeds and flags, now dry and withered, clash and rattle again as they rush over the flats. In that clump of tangled reed, flag, rush, and coarse bents is the heron, standing on one leg, warm and snug, his head and neck drawn in to his shoulders. The wind may blow its hardest, but it only knits the tangle closer. It is no trouble for him to make a way in and out as he requires it. The tide is just near the ebb turn; when it is fairly on the ebb he will be moving. Although there is no town clock to tell him the time, he knows, in some way or other, to a minute when the tide has fairly turned. And now he rises from his place of refuge, right in the middle of the tangle in which he had been hiding. His long,

limber, clinging toes enable him to grasp the reeds and flags in order to climb sufficiently high to give room for his wings to play. His cousin the bittern is more expert in the art of getting up out of cover than is the heron, but then he is also more given to hiding himself.

Now he is well up, and he comes on with some more herons after him. This is the time to note his play of wing, for the wind blows strong. The birds try to beat to windward, but the blast catches them turning them fairly up on one side. They thresh and flap vigorously to recover their balance, and succeed in doing so after a time, to be caught again in the same manner. Over the sea wall and on over the saltings they flap, and they drop down close to the edge of the ebbing tide. But what a change is this from their summer haunts. The haze that flickered over the slub and softened the distance has given place to the keen clear air of winter, when the dry black frosts hold the marsh and dykes in their icy grip. Sails of ships can be seen in the offing, and the minster tower stands out in clear relief against the sky. About a mile away a dark cloud appears to hang over the water, towards which it falls and rises again. On the water a long line of black shows. It is a gaggle of Brent geese, part of which are on the

water, paddling on the ebb; the rest have risen on wing and are dipping and flapping up and down, impatient for the long sea grass to show bare for them to graze on. Other birds rush up for their share from the shingle of the beach five miles away—dunlins, sanderlings, and knots. The curlews are there as a matter of course; where the lug or sandworm is abundant you will find those birds in great numbers. The heron has no longer the shore to himself, as he had it in summer; others share it with him, as well as the food that the tide leaves. The dunlins run nimbly over the surface left bare, busily pecking and dibbing at something in or on the slub. If you rouse a flock of them and look at the place where they were, you will see thousands of little depressions left by the tips of their bills. Their prey must be very small—minute crustaceans, probably, or the spat of some mollusk. The sanderlings and knots keep more apart. The tangle round stones finds favour with them. They will mix with the dunlins at times, and with curlews in close company, but not one of them will get within reach of the heron. One blow and a grip, a dabble in the water to wet the poor victim's feathers and make them lie closer, and little Master Dunlin, or any other bird of his size, goes down his gullet at a gulp. Look at them following the tide,

with neck stretched out and bill a little open, ready for anything. Now and then it looks as if a squabble were going on, as some one heron, more fortunate than another, gets a better find ; of course, the one next to him wants to share it, and then ensue sundry flappings of wings and extraordinary dancing movements. One or two rise and drop down again a few yards away to continue their search. What they feed on could only be found out by first shooting one, and then examining the contents of his stomach. Scores of birds of all sorts are shot, skinned, and stuffed, and their bodies eaten, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the stomach is never inspected. It is very convenient to say this bird, or that small animal, feeds almost exclusively on such and such a diet, but that proves nothing: you can only really tell what a creature feeds on, as the seasons vary, by the contents of its stomach.

I will give a few of the favourite morsels of the heron. Eels, being a standing dish with him, must come first: after these the young of land and water birds, water rats, mice, frogs, fish of all sorts, shrimps, and small crabs. And if any little bunny happened to be dotting round a mole-hill—having come out of the burrow for the first time just to see how large the world was—when the heron was gliding

near with his noiseless step, it would certainly never see its mother again.

Now our birds have neared the ferry, and that is the extent of their feeding ground; they will soon fly back into the marsh.

They are on wing. Very slowly they make headway, for the wind is against them, and they are low down. A shot is heard from the base of the sea-wall close to a sluice. A great commotion follows, for the leading bird, a fine cock heron, is hit in one wing. He loses his balance at once, and drifts back on his companions. The others are alarmed, and for a moment there is a flapping and whirl of wings in dire confusion, the fierce wind huddling them up one on the other. It lasts only a few minutes; they get clear and fly over the marsh in different directions. The wounded bird tries with all his might for a time to keep up, for he is only tipped; soon he begins to wobble and flap, and at last drops on the marsh. The shooter has a water spaniel with him; the dog has been intently watching the effect of the shot, and seeing the bird drop, makes for it at once. The shooter tells me his dog is a young one, and his training is not yet finished. 'Come back, Nep! come back, Nep! Come back, I tell you! Ah, by Jove, he's got it! pretty hot, too; hear him yelp.' He had

got it, and no mistake, for the bird, half raising himself on the ground with his sound wing and feet, had let drive as the dog rushed in to fix him. The first stroke, aimed at one of his eyes, missed, and took effect on the forehead, making a wound you could put the tip of your finger in. The second stroke crippled a foreleg, and the dog needed no more calling, but limped back to his master.

'Come here and let's see the mischief. Well, you've got something to remember this time. It's been a precious near squeak for you, Nep, but you'll get over it, and you'll not try to pick up a live Jack Hern again; you'll let 'em alone as long as you live, I'll warrant.'

The bird lay with crest raised, his long neck moving snake-like from side to side, and the feathers of the breast spread out, all ready to do battle. Walking up to him, the man said, 'No, you don't; not with me, at any rate; take that!' hitting him a crack on the head with the butt-end of his gun. The heron raised himself for a last stroke at his enemy's legs.

A keeper once said to me, 'No; I never lets a retriever pick up one o' they hungry varmints unless they're dead. If they only gets winged I give 'em a cut across the neck with a stick—a thund'rin' good un, mind ye, and that settles 'em.'

'And what do you do with them then?' I asked.

'Nails 'em up on the side o' the old barn along o' the hawks an' the owls; because, don't you see, in my mind they belongs to the birds o' prey; if they don't they ought to; they kills anything, and so I'll do for they.'

To have a stuffed heron is the ambition of many would-be gunners, to put in a case and to be able to say they shot it. One man I knew had a perfect craze for it, amounting in time to an attack of heron on the brain. Many were his plans and schemes to gain his desire. If you happened to mention you had seen a heron you were buttonholed at once. 'Eh! what! Seen one? Why, bless my soul, where? Eh! Here, come and have a glass of something and tell me all about it. Ah, it's always the case; anybody can see 'em but me!'

A dozen could have been brought to him, but that would not do; he must shoot one himself. At last news reached him that a heron came regularly, night and morning, to a fishpond near a lonely farmhouse. 'Could he see it?' Certainly he could.

He went post-haste to the place, and sure enough up rose the bird. Over unlimited grog, and amidst the smoke puffed forth from long 'churchwardens,' the question 'how to get him' was discussed with the

farm bailiff, who was a good-hearted fellow, and in comfortable circumstances.

Many plans were made and tried, but all failed. As a last resource it was suggested that this sportsman should have some kind of rough shelter made, and should watch for his heron all night, the bailiff, nothing loth, agreeing to sit up with him there till eleven o'clock, the moon being full and bright. A square dumpy bottle, holding a quart and hailing from Holland, together with some first-rate tobacco that had come with it, which the enthusiast had promised to supply, probably made the companionship a congenial one. Near midnight the bailiff took his departure, after shaking hands with our friend many times over, remarking as he did so that the moon twinkled a goodish bit, and things looked hazy round about. 'Steady does it, old boy, steady does it. When he comes, hold your powder straight an' knock him over. Steady does it, old boy. Good-night! Good-night!'

Early in the morning the heron passed overhead and settled on the opposite side of the small pond, almost in front of the sportsman. It ought not to have been very hard to hit the bird; but the contents of that queer-shaped bottle, or may be only the excitement of the moment, made his hand shake, and

when his finger touched the trigger he only winged the coveted prize. Down went his gun, round the pond he rushed, and, not knowing the nature or tactics of the bird, he knelt down to pick him up. At the same moment the heron made one of its lightning-like strokes at one of his eyes. Luckily for him the bird's neck came in contact with his arm, spoiling the aim. As it was, the bill cut a shallow furrow on the cheek-bone under the eye aimed at. Undaunted, he made a loop with one end of his handkerchief and placed it round the neck just below the head. The other end he tied round the heron's legs. In fact, he haltered him. Then he tucked him under his arm like a goose, and picking up his gun, marched home, a proud and happy man, arriving just as the village folks were going into breakfast. Seeing a friend coming down the street he exclaimed, 'I've got him!' 'I see you have; but what is that cut on your cheek?' replied the friend, adding, when he had been told how it occurred, 'Why, man alive! never do such a thing again; why, if that bird had made his stroke good, you would certainly have lost your eye, if not your life. You have had a very narrow escape.'

'Eh! what! bless me! you don't say so? Really now, dear me, dear me, eh!' Then, in a tone of voice

evincing great determination, he said, 'I'm going to have him stuffed; expense no object.' The bird was stuffed, I have seen it many times! a wondrous work of art it is. The bird stands in a case about the size of a large clothes-box, which is painted black outside and bright ultra-marine blue inside, in order to show him up well. At regular distances are tufts of flag three inches high. Close to his feet on the asphalt-looking gravel is a bit of stone tinted in many colours. Great efforts seem to have been made to give a natural effect to the whole, but, strange to say, the bird does not look happy; he squints for one thing, and he has the gout in his legs, for the wire used in the mysteries of stuffing would have supported an Australian emu.

But that matters not: the genial old fellow is happy, for he imagines nothing better, and his friends, to their credit be it spoken, have never undeceived him. When he invites them to his house, as he frequently does, to spend a sociable evening, at a certain point of the proceedings he invariably gives them for about the fiftieth time the account of his scuffle with that heron. It is so much enjoyed, that many go to sleep over it, but he does not observe it, for his eyes are fixed on the black box and its inmate—memory is busy with him, and it is very late.

On the wild moorlands you will find the heron close to the rills which have communication with the trout streams. An autumn evening is the time to look for him there, when the mists are rising from the low meadows and floating round the woods on the hill sides. Over the tops of the trees, which are in all their warm bright colouring, you will see him coming leisurely along. No sound is heard save the hoot of the brown owl; and, with the exception of a woodman returning home after his day's work, there is no one to be seen. The air is so quiet that the distant slamming of a gate, the bark of a dog, and now and again the lowing of cattle in the distance falls on the ear with singular distinctness. The heron knows well the time best suited to him; slowly he flaps over the meadows, his form showing dim through the rising mists of evening. He does not settle yet; he has a recollection of a shot having been fired at him from the cover of the woods close by, when the shot knocked some feathers out of him, without further damage. 'Once bit, twice shy' is his motto now. Rising again he makes for the upland moor, where he has a good look-out. It is not needed, for, with the exception of the owls, hooting out their jubilate, he will have no company, unless another of his family joins him. Sometimes you will see two of

them together, more rarely three, oftenest a solitary one. The moor rills are full of small trout about the size of gudgeon. If a fly tumbles into the water or rests on it, twenty rush for him at once. They will rush, too, for shelter in shoals when alarmed—in *droves* one might say. Just the size for Jack Hern they are, and he finds them a dainty morsel. No angler would take the trouble to catch these. So many mouths too, though small, require a great amount of food to fill them. You will not find a fish the size of a herring in the rills that run down from the moor. Besides which, the bottom is peaty, and large trout do not run up to spawn there; they want a gravel bottom, and a clean one for that. There is a certain amount of policy in allowing the heron to fish undisturbed in these rills. Better it is for him to visit the moor rills than the streams below where the trout are larger; for very few trout of a pound in weight and larger ever recover from a stroke made by the heron if they do manage to escape at the time. Some gentlemen, through whose property these little streams trickle, have made them wider in places, and formed ponds. Where this has been done the small moorland trout have vanished, you will not find one. Large trout have come in their place, much to the satisfaction of the gentlemen fishers, but not to that of the heron.

The large fish give him more trouble, he is not able to fill his belly so quickly. All manner of destructive work is attributed to him, some of which he is quite innocent of. Such things as fish spears are made at home, in view of trout capture. Occasionally the fish will slip off one of these spears after being struck, and it is found dead or dying in the pond or stream. If that intelligent person the keeper catches sight of it, he exclaims, 'Them mischiefful varmints has been here agin, workin' the trout.' And so they have, but it was not the herons in this instance. Clever and quick as the bird is, he is not able to give three wounds at one stroke and all in a line. He will pick at a fish too large for him to swallow whole, but as a rule he feeds on the smaller fry. Necessity knows no law, however, and there is no reasoning with an empty stomach. When that troubles him he will fill it with the first food that presents itself. Any one who has seen a mole-hill heaving near the top of a hillock knows how the earth rises up and down and rolls down the sides. The heron knows the meaning of it, for he makes a dart, and has the mole between his bill in an instant. This he will only do when very hard up for a meal; he is bound to have something then. Nearly all his food, however, is taken from the edge of the water or from shallow pools. He can swim,

but he never does that when fishing. His attitudes are varied, like his diet. The usually accepted position for him is standing with his head and neck drawn down on to the shoulders, with both feet on the ground or in the water, as the case may be. Though represented thus in most illustrations, you will find him so but rarely. His usual position is, neck held upright, head, bill, and body carried horizontally, one foot on the ground, the other just raised off it with the toes bent inwards. When the heron is after his prey, and moving, the head and neck are stretched out, and the body carried in a line with them. A curious-looking bird he is, when he squats down to rest; and he looks still more grotesque when standing, if seen from behind, after he has partaken of a good feed. His shoulders are lumped up, and his head and bill are not visible, for they are sunk in his shoulders, the bill pointing a little downwards. But see him when and where you will, and in whatever position he may place himself, he is a most interesting bird to all true lovers of life in a state of nature, and must always command attention.

If a field has been ploughed and left fallow for a season anywhere near his haunts, he and his companions—if he chance to have any—are certain to visit it, for he is sure of safety and food there; but

catch him within gunshot of the hedge, or trees that surround it, if you can. On the ploughed field he has a view all round him. The food he picks up there consists of plump fieldmice and frogs.

Speaking of frogs, it is generally supposed, and the supposition is accepted, that the proper place to look for them is in or near the water. Excepting in spring, when all the shallow pools are well stocked with them at spawning time, I have only found a very few, at rare intervals, near water; but never one of the kind which I have seen so often a long distance from it.

Reptiles have a great attraction for me, and, as far as our English ones are concerned, I have made close acquaintance with them all, and handled them freely—the viper not excepted.

It is possible that we have a variety of frog that has not been generally recognised—which is to be found in places supposed to be unlikely, I mean. The heron knows all about that matter. Large, bright, and plump fellows with beautiful eyes, their colour a warm Sienna yellow, spotted with warm brown spots. A kangaroo-like leap they have, and they conceal themselves under any tuft of grass or plant large enough to give them shelter—not haphazard fashion, but in regular homes. If you examine

the place where one has sprung from, you will find the depression where the frog squatted; and if you catch sight of him before he springs you will see that his back is just on a level with the ground, and he is completely hidden by a plant or tuft of grass. A footstep will start him or make him move uneasily and betray his whereabouts.

Mice make their shallow runs and holes a few inches deep in the same locality; they are in first-rate condition, plump and sleek; you may see them running up the stems of different plants to get at the seeds, and then follow them to their holes. Other small things besides mice and frogs there are about the field frequented by our heron, but his attention is principally directed to these. Very few creatures in a wild state, furred or feathered, that are in the least carnivorous, can resist the temptation of making a meal of a mouse, or including it in one, whenever the chance offers.

Jack Hern nests rook-fashion in the trees, where these and the locality are suited to his taste. In some parts which are treeless, he will make a virtue of necessity and nest in the fern or stunted cover on some rock or island; for a bird of many resources is the common heron.

AN AUTUMN RAMBLE IN SURREY

'THE birds are flighting over the moor and in the junipers . . . I have seen some birds about very much like blackbirds and near their size, only some of them have a white ring round the neck and they are very shy. If you can make it convenient to come, get here about three in the afternoon.'

It is not often you can see the ring-ouzel in the south of England, so on receiving my friend's note I set aside everything else for the day, and putting note and sketch-book in my pocket, set off, ten minutes later, my trusty ash stick in hand, for a good eight miles swing through woodland lanes and pastures, and along roads planted with great elm trees, varied here and there by an old oak and an occasional ash. The trees are changing from the green of summer to the more brilliant colouring of autumn. The distant hills, covered with beech and oak, show rich reds and yellows, broken up by warm olive. Nearing the moorlands the paths are broken at the

sides, exposing fine fibrous roots. Heather grows in patches, and firs are clumped about; a mountain ash flashes out with its load of crimson clusters—a treat for the birds. They will soon be gone, for the missel thrush, song thrush, and blackbird dearly love these berries. I have eaten them myself often when roaming the woods. In Russia they are put in spirits, as we do cherries, to make a warm winter cordial; jelly, also, to eat with game, is made from them. Rather bitter their flavour is, but decidedly aromatic. Furze in full flower is dotted about. Right in front of me is a giant fir, struck by lightning in a late thunderstorm. Great limbs of it, as large as some of the surrounding trees, are twisted like ropes; a few limbs have escaped and show in weird contrast by their dark green foliage against the others which are scorched to tinder. From the trunk where the bolt struck the bark and ripped it off, long strips hang. A tree such as Gustave Doré's pencil would have reproduced: twisted, tortured limbs like those in Danté's 'Inferno'! Close to is heard the ripple of a trout-stream.

A peculiar feature of this road leading to the moorlands is, that in sheltered nooks and hollows you come on many very old manor farm-houses, covered with mosses, lichens, and house-leeks, standing in fine

old fashioned gardens and orchards, the whole surrounded by great elms. They have many windows with lead lights; and porches which would seat a whole family; walls shut them in, grown over with every coloured lichen, silver grey, pale green, and orange. Ferns and mosses spring from between the stones. The very look of these homesteads brings a feeling of rest and quiet. Inside are large rooms with beams across the ceilings, and wainscot panelling runs right up to the top. The doors open with a latch, and passages lead to all manner of strange nooks and corners, and cupboards abound. If you are fortunate enough, as I have sometimes been, to be located in one of these old-time farm-houses, you will feel the blessed rest of a land of sleepy hollow, grateful sometimes after beating along the hard highroads.

The hedges are a tangled mass of vegetation; wild clematis, bryony, nightshade, ferns, and grasses. Briars display their red berries; hawthorn, sloes, and nut-trees complete the show. In a tree just over my head a scolding chatter makes me look up. It proceeds from a family of young squirrels, this year's brood. They have come from the firs on a nutting expedition. Three of them there are, and very comical little fellows they look with their dormouse-like tails, for they are not yet bushy. They stamp,

scold, and chatter at me, and, instead of retreating higher up the tree, come lower down to have a look at me. They are young and innocent, but will be wiser before the winter is over. Young squirrels are pets I should not care to keep ; they cry so pitifully for their mother.

With the exception of a kestrel hovering over a meadow, and a covey of partridges dusting in the road, I have not seen any bird-life yet. The reason of that is, in the beginning of the fall of the year, birds, with very few exceptions, frequent the open fields, which abound in food of all kinds. Sparrows, even, take a holiday then. Those that come about my door to be fed at breakfast-time leave me at this time for about six or eight weeks. They have just now returned from their holiday, as hungry and as impudent as ever.

We have reached the moor ; but it is a Surrey moor, rich in vegetation and green turf, not a bare waste. The blue sky overhead is flecked here and there with fleecy clouds, and a soft breeze, just strong enough to whisper through the firs, comes from the south. A stretch of thirty miles across the weald shows the South-down hills, with many chalk quarries in their sides and hollows. That flash of soft light between the distant hills is the open sea.

The heather and furze are in full bloom, while the bramble and whortleberry shrubs, clothed in every shade of green, russet, and crimson, are brought into relief by the peculiar grey-green of the juniper trees. Here and there are clumps of rank rushes with stems of cotton grass, and a few bushes of black alder, the gunpowder wood of the foresters. This patch of treacherous ground, which is covered with verdure and feels like a floating sponge when you step on it, is where the wild ducks bring their young to feed after they have hatched them among the heather. I have known the cottagers drive them out of the springs, where they have gone to fetch water, without molesting them.

A call-note sounds in the air. I look up; birds are passing over at the top of their speed, so as to make the South downs before the light fades away. The light creeps along the sloping hill-sides where they will rest for the night before crossing the water. I gather from their notes and their manner of flight that they are nearly all finches. They keep passing for about half an hour. Now is the time for looking out for the ring-ouzels. They will soon begin to roost up in the hilly portion of the moor. I am among the juniper trees, most of which are covered with berries. I generally eat a few of these in

passing; they are not unpleasant and are considered wholesome. The ring-ouzel is very fond of them. Some years this bird is not seen on the moors; sometimes only a pair or two pay them a visit, and another season they are very common. They do not tarry long, but seem to be resting to regain strength for a long journey.

A note something like that of a blackbird, only harsher, near at hand, makes me conceal myself. The hen shows herself; the cock will not be far away; there he is, sitting twelve yards in front of me, feeding on the berries; I can see him as I peer through the branches. His gorget is a pure white; he is very like the blackbird in many respects, but is a stronger bird, and his actions are wilder. His quick eyes have caught me, and his suspicious nature is aroused. Giving the alarm to his mate, he is off and away. I now turn towards the fir woods at the edge of the moor. On my way there I come across a hollow at the side of the bog, thick with fern, rushes, and tangle. A sound of water trickling catches my ear. This is just the place for blackcock, if there are any about. Drawing up very quickly I begin to poke about with my stick. There is nothing here. Stay, right from under my feet there is a rush, with a clap! clap! Whirr! gluck! gluck! gluck! and a

splendid blackcock, in full dress, flies away. Why they will sometimes allow one to come so very near them is a mystery to me. As a rule they are the most wary of game birds, and at the sound of footsteps are up and off. I have actually known them to be captured by hand when the plumage has been saturated with the dew which the bird has brushed off the cover in ranging for his food. As I trudge on, a rabbit now and then dots across the path till I reach the main track through the woods. Here I fall in with one of the woodmen, on his way home.

'So you've come to have a look at us agin, have ye? I was lookin' at somethin' from my house the other night that was going on over this way.'

'What could you see from that distance?'

'Why, the forest on fire again. I could see the flames travelling high up at racing speed, and knew by the direction where it was burning. It warn't only here, 'twas on the other hills as well, about the same time too; but bless ye! 'twas only a lick just to clear the tangle off.'

'Is that long stretch in the valley below where it raged?'

'Yes, but it ain't nothin' of any account. Why 'tis all tuffety a'ready with fresh feed for the stock. As 'twas, and had been, 'twas nothing better than a

harber for them crawlin' varmints—you knows 'em. Why the young uns was afraid to come up this 'ere stripe for worts; for they was hissin' and crawlin' all over the place. It's cleared 'em off for a time, I reckon.'

'What was the cause of that fire, do ye think?'

'An uncommon good un, if I could just get them words out what some gentleman said as was paintin' picturs about here. 'Twas spon—somethin' or other. I know it was a spon.'

'Was it spontaneous combustion?'

'Yes, that's it; don't it sound gran'?' Turning round and looking me full in the face, he continued: 'You knows us, and we knows you; yes, it was just that ere spontaneous combustun; and I reckon there's more on it comin' before long. 'Tain't a bad name for it. Maybe there's another, but spon— sounds best. One thing I'm going to tell ye, and most mortal strange 'tis too. 'Twas a dark night, as you knows; well, when the fire was tearin' full speed, we hears a noise overhead what brought all on us to a stand. 'Twas a sort of cryin' whistle like; on'y there seemed to be no end to it. Sometimes 'twas just overhead, then 'twas high up, and then it come from the firs. It was a row, and no mistake. Some on 'em said it warn't a nateral noise. Whatever it was

gets over me. I've been bothered about it ever since.'

'Well, now, listen! Was the sound anything like this?' I asked, as I imitated the cry of the golden plover.

'That's it; what was the meanin' on it all?'

'Why, some flocks of golden plover going to the coast,' I replied, for I had seen them myself that same night. 'They were bothered by the flames and smoke, and for a time lost their reckoning.'

'Ah, well, I've learnt somethin'. These 'ere lights in the sky o' nights 'll soon stop. Things 'll soon come to a better level; they're bound to. We has our rights o' common, pasterage in cover for cleftfooted stock, and range o' woods in mast and aker (acorn) time for swine, and grazin' for geese. Now, you gets rummagin' about a good bit, an' I want to ask ye if ye knows what these 'ere village greens was kept for, and why they're in the middle o' the villages?'

'They were used as goose-greens. It is a well-known fact that stock do not care to feed where geese have been grazing, for they foul the pasture. In an old-fashioned village you will find first the church, with the stocks just outside its gates, then the alehouse facing the goose-green and pond, round

which the houses are, so that each cottager might have an eye to his geese.'

'That's as used to be; but just you let a goose waddle on to the green now, and see what a chouter they make. You has to let 'em nib by the road, and if you has a Neddy you must take 'tickler care as he don't walk about on the roads o' nights croppin' thistles. But bide a bit; peaceable folks we be, an' always have been; we want nothin' but our rights, such as they be, and we means to have 'em. Like the badgers what hides in yonder hills, we never meddles, and don't want to be meddled with. They're quiet and means no harm, but if you drives 'em in a corner they fights tooth and nail desprit; and a quiet fighter is the wust un to tackle.'

If one can inspire sufficient confidence in men of our friend's stamp and class to cause them to open out their minds freely, one becomes aware of a fast gathering spirit of discontent and dissatisfaction which will make itself openly felt some day. These cottagers and labouring men one might call Conservative Democrats. They are dimly conscious that the world is fast moving on; the old landmarks are being removed, but others are set up. In the old days, though their wages were less, there were privileges and 'pickings' to be got from the old

gentry, who had been amongst them from time immemorial, which they miss now. Their homes and the land they till are owned by new men of capital, who do not dress or walk like the traditional country gentleman, and the picturesque spots are haunted by an artist class who get workmen from London to build their 'furrin-looking' bright red villas, and whose provisions come, as their goods and chattels do, from great firms in town. The cottagers hate to see them painting on their commons, and will often surlily refuse to let themselves be put in a picture. 'They does us no good,' they say, 'an' they wants to get our common from us.'

Two graves, one on the hill and one in the valley, I was wishful to revisit. The first was that of my friend George ——, a fine fellow who had faded gradually away after taking a severe cold in the forest. I remembered his funeral well.

The churchyard where George was buried is on the top of a high hill. The church and its surroundings are sheltered by grand old trees and upland meadows. Two miles down in the valley, at the foot of the firs, he had his home. Round the door and on the little grass plot the neighbours gathered from far and near to pay the last mark of respect to him. There was no lack of bearers, though the

distance was long and the ascent heavy, before they reached his last resting-place. The coffin having been brought out they fell back on either side for his relatives to pass, and then the inhabitants of more than one scattered hamlet fell in to form a long procession, and proceeded on the road through the firs. Others joined them from various forest tracks, and presently the assemblage was complete. Even the children from the moorland school were there, walking two-and-two, hand-in-hand. George was beloved by all; he had lived all his life in their hamlet, and married a wife from it; and his manly, gentle bearing and generous nature had endeared him to all.

No fashionable mourning garb is to be seen here. The lasses have their Sunday dress on, and some of the men are in their working clothes, having thrown down the axe and billhook to join the procession. There is nothing out of place in their mixed garb, the surroundings are in harmony with it, and the whole forms a most impressive scene.

When the churchyard is reached, the followers arrange themselves in a circle round the grave. The lasses have little bunches of flowers—those of them, at least, who have been able to get some; the others have sprigs of fir, juniper, and heather.

And now the clergyman is heard saying, 'I am the resurrection and the life,' there are the mournful sounds of the earth falling on the coffin and the sobs of the mourners.

Slowly, two by two, they file past; the women and the lasses drop their sprigs and flowers in the open grave and depart as they came, to discuss in sober-faced groups the good qualities of him who has gone

On his tombstone is graven—

I'm a pilgrim and a stranger,
Rough and thorny is the road,
Often in the midst of danger;
But it leads to God!

ROOKS AND THEIR RELATIVES

THAT fine bird, the raven, will soon be a lost link in England, unless some ardent lovers of the ornaments of our woods and hills procure protection for him in some way or other. Some years back he was frequently to be seen. I have known him breed within half a mile of a country town on a gentleman's estate; a pair built their nest in a great ragged Scotch fir, but after their young ones had been taken from them twice to be kept as domestic pets, they deserted their quarters and were not seen there again.

The raven is a handsome bird; his jet-black plumage shows flashes of blue and purple; and when a little excited the feathers on his throat are puffed out, the wings drooped, and he half hops, half walks round his dwelling-place, crying 'cruk-cruk-croak!' continually cocking his head, first on one side, then on the other, if any one stops to admire him. His bright eyes will take in all the surroundings in a most wide-awake manner; you will not catch him

off his guard, nor will it be safe for any one but his owner to attempt to stroke his plumage. That pickaxe of a bill can give a blow not soon forgotten. The worst of keeping a raven as a pet is—and the same thing applies to crows, rooks, and jackdaws when in a state of captivity—he will carry off and hide away any article that takes his fancy. Other birds and animals will hide their surplus food, and nothing more; but the raven secures anything that takes his fancy, a watch and chain, a pocket-knife, a silver spoon, or a hymn-book; and he will plan out the job some time before he attempts to execute it. In nine cases out of ten he manages to carry it out successfully. I once saw a raven's curiosity-shop overhauled. It was in a large heap of garden refuse; the bird stood watching them turn it out; after there had been long and vain dodging of his wily movements, and as one article after another was brought to light, he made several most determined attempts to recover what he evidently considered his individual property. Being foiled, he 'cut up rough,' to say the least of it, and refused comfort of all kinds. Day after day they found him hopping round his beloved hiding-place, croaking like a feathered demon. I am not prepared to give any opinion as to the harm the raven may be supposed to do by some people—I can

only say that in my own neighbourhood, which is surrounded on all sides by the Surrey hills, I have never heard any complaints about him; not even in breeding time. Probably a pair or two would be very useful in some places where birds have been cut down by disease and lie rotting all over the land. One thing is against him, he is considered a bird of ill omen; if one or a couple make up their minds to settle down near any habitation, a charge of shot is their certain welcome.

It is a wonder that any are left in the country; it is said some are still to be found in the wild parts of Sussex, but I cannot vouch for the fact, though I think it is very likely to be true.

The crow, or carrion crow, is to all intents and purposes a dwarf raven. In shape and plumage he resembles his giant relative, and he is even more reviled than the raven. Tell any gamekeeper that you consider the crow a bold and handsome bird, and he will either answer you with some highly seasoned observations, or look at you with an expression of wondering pity, and then try to enlighten your dark mind as to that bird's capabilities for evil and mischief. He hunts them from morning to night, often with very little success; a good old carrion crow is not got at very easily. If a pair of them hunt to-

gether, the chance of knocking them over is very slight indeed, for one will watch while the other feeds. On hearing the least sound, or at the sight of a suspicious object, there is a dip up and down of the body a flirt with the outspread tail, and 'croake-e, croake-e!' —the keeper may turn his attention to some other matters, for he will not see them again during the next hour or two. As a rule he is put out of the way by trap or poison; he is in such bad odour with game preservers that one crow will keep three or four on a large estate on the look-out for him.

In a confined state he resembles the raven very much in his manœuvres and method of feeding.

The hooded crow, or grey crow of the coast-people, is in shape like the carrion crow, but his habits are very different. He likes the sea-shore and the downs gently rising from the edge of the water arms of the sea; and the creeks that run inland for miles are his favourite places of resort when he pays his visits, for he is more or less a bird of passage. I have watched him there many a time as he moved about continually. You will not find numbers of them, but single pairs dotted along the coast close to the water's edge in autumn and winter. The black-backed gull and herring-gull range the coast-line, the common gull the creeks and flats. Feeding near, and sometimes with

them, you will see the hooded crow. Sometimes he is shot miles inland, where he has certain favourite places of resort; in the large tracts of uncultivated country that fortunately still remain to us he is quite at home, and he does his best to live honestly there. There is much insane raving about cultivating the 'wastes' for the benefit of the community at large, but I should like to see the babblers try the experiment; the ground is so poor in the best portions of some of these 'wastes' that it will not grow enough nourishing vegetation to fatten the rabbits—called hedgehog rabbits—that swarm in the barren spots. If one wished to offend a person, one could not do it more effectually than by inviting him to dine off a pair of these pinwire vermin.

The hooded crow will walk round the sheepfolds, perch on the top of the fold-stakes, and examine the sheep with a critical eye, especially if there is any disease about. He is constantly flapping from one spot to another; I do not think I have ever seen one quiet for five minutes together. The grave charges preferred against his near relative are not extended to him; he seems to be a useful picker-up of unconsidered trifles, a grey-cloaked scavenger of the line of downs and sandhills bordering on the sea-shore.

The common rook, common though he is, is very

little known or understood by a great many of the people who see him fly overhead or walk behind the plough. For twelve years I have lived close to a large rookery, and have had the birds about, within a few yards of my house door, at all seasons. In the spring his plumage glistens in the sunlight as he walks about. Any one seeing him bow to the object of his affections, puffing out his feathers and making a fan of his tail, would call him a handsome fellow. He is a most intelligent bird, devoted to his wife and family, and has an excellent character for early rising. There are differences of opinion as to his qualities among agriculturists; but I should say the verdict must be in his favour, for among twenty sorts of birds shot you will not find one rook, and he is a difficult bird to get if you want one as a specimen.

About the middle of February they are busy inspecting their nests of the previous season. Long and loud are the discussions as to the amount of repairs needed for their airy cradles. These continue for some days, the birds going back, as evening draws near, to the roosting-places where they have slept all through the winter months. One such place, heavily timbered, and well sheltered, and having a southern aspect, is near my house. It holds them in vast numbers, and thence the congregated rookeries spread

in all directions; each lot of rooks going to the same line of country that they had been in the habit of frequenting during the previous breeding season, and all returning to the grand old roosting-spot at night. I watch their movements morning and evening with great interest. Directly it is light they are high up in the air, looking no larger than blackbirds. As they come over their famous breeding-place in the old lime avenue of the park, they fly round and round in circles, cawing loudly. Then they commence a series of tumbling and darting movements of the most curious and rapid nature. Those who have not seen it would not think them capable of so great a command of wing. After these gyrations they look at their old nests and then fly off to feed; and some break off from the main body and visit the elms that have not been blown down at the Court Lodge farm. Others go to some elms in one of the hedgerows where a small colony has started a nesting-place. After a heavy gale of wind they are sure to be seen very closely inspecting the nests, directly it is over. It is wonderful how long these will last, and what hurricanes they will bear the brunt of without being seriously damaged. Constructed in the first instance of green and pliant twigs, they are laced into the pliant forked and topmost branches of the trees, and

the whole fabric swings backwards and forwards as the wind blows. They are not often blown out of the trees, but once I did see this happen, just at the time when the young ones were beginning to call to their parents. A terrible gale cleared the lot from the trees and drove the old birds all over the place. On the following day, when all was very quiet again, they sat about in the trees, looking most dejected, their heads drawn into their shoulders, mere black bunches of misery.

They are very fond of their young, and pay them the greatest attention. May and June are the months to watch their domestic economy, for the rookery is in full voice and activity then, and father rook is busy digging from morning till night.

The bare space under the bill and round it is a natural feature of the bird, and not caused by his digging operations as some might suppose. He looks after his mate well when she is sitting, and when the young are lately hatched and she is not yet able to leave them. Then the pouch which is under his bill comes into requisition. He collects all kinds of dainties, beetles, grubs, worms, and other small trifles, until a good-sized pellet is formed, larger than a walnut. This he bears up to her, and perching close to the nest he cackles to her in the most affectionate

manner, which she responds to in the same way ; then she opens her mouth and her mate places his collection of dainties in it and flies off at once for another stock of provisions. She does not swallow the whole at first, but twists the pellet over and bites it about ; all the digestible portion is then devoured, the rest she lets fall to the ground. This process goes on all day, from the early morning till late in the evening ; father rook filling his own stomach at the same time. It is a very anxious time for him and his partner when the young ones leave the nest and begin to perch a little on the branches ; for then rook-shooting commences. This sport is not so much followed as it used to be. At the first two or three discharges the whole rookery is in a cawing uproar. Then, as the young ones fall, one after another, with a thud on to the ground, they can put up with it no longer, but rise in a black cloud and ring round and round, gradually getting higher and higher until they are at an immense height, looking like small black spots, their clamour sounding very faint on the ear. It is only when the day is drawing to a close that they will come down and count the living.

In exceptionally hot and dry summers, like that of 1887, the rook suffers as much as he does in a severe winter, for the ground is too hard for them to

get anything out of it; the worms and other things have gone low down where they can find moisture. I have seen them all through the summer, driven by hunger, throw off their natural caution and come boldly into the gardens of the populous town for the fruit and vegetables. They would pull the half-ripe cherries off the trees in bunches, within a few yards of one. As for the new potatoes, they would have dug them all up if they had not been shot at all day long. They hunted over low-lying water-meadows, and water-courses, and rubbish-heaps for what they could pick up. Many of the birds had only just enough life in them to flap along. When things were at the worst a change set in for the better, and warm rain fell in the neighbourhood at intervals during twenty-four hours.

Close to the rookery is a recreation-ground, like a small common, and used for grazing purposes. It is covered with fine turf. Upon this is my house, and close to it is the rookery. When the rain was falling their manifestations of delight were great; they perched thick on the bare branches of the dead trees, and cawed and cackled to their hearts' content, shaking the water off their feathers like half-mad things. The rain brought the worms out of their holes in thousands all over the burnt-up surface.

Down flew the rooks, and for the first time for many weeks they made a hearty meal. Some of them, in fact, gorged to such an extent that they flew up on to the drying-posts scattered over the ground, and sat there without taking notice of anything or anybody. The next day not a rook was to be seen near the town. Hard times were over for them, and they were scattered far and wide over the surrounding fields.

In the autumn when the nuts are ripe the rook is busy. Walnuts are his especial favourites. You will not see a bird near the place until they are ready for thrashing down; but when that time has come a solitary pioneer will appear first, high up, inspecting the tree or trees. The next day he will be joined by one or two more. After wheeling about and over the place they will settle and examine the state of the crop. If the outer rind is loosened from the shell of the nut, a problem soon solved by the birds biting a piece off, they will fly away and give information to the rest that luxuries are to be had. Then a number come, nipping the nuts off in the most wholesale manner and flying off with them. In the first field or meadow they dine; with a dig or two of the powerful bill they split off the outer covering, and then with one more dig open the nut and eat the contents. They are quickly back for more.

'Hi! Gip! Rooks!' cries a man's voice, and a fine old dog dashes over the lawn a dozen times a day, barking his loudest to scare them off, for if left to themselves they will clear the heaviest crop from the trees in a very short time. It is no use thinking of shooting them; you may point a stick at them and flourish it about as much as you like, and it will not disturb them in the least. A gun is a different matter; only let them catch sight of one, and instead of committing their robberies in an open and deliberate manner, as is their usual way, they will clatter into the trees like hawks when they get a chance, nip off the nuts and fly away. The only effectual plan is to trap one. I once saw the experiment tried. One of them hopped into a common trap, set openly, only so secured that the bird could not fly off with it. Finding himself in trouble the rook yelled out his note of alarm. Up the others clattered, cawing their loudest and dropping some of their plunder. All their friends round about came to see what was the matter and to join in the uproar. Flying round and dashing down to him as though to get him out, and finding this no use, they were frightened out of their wits by their comrade's frantic shouts, and mounted high up in the air, cawing their loudest. When the captive had his neck twisted, and he was

spread-eagled out on a stick for his companions' inspection, the business was settled; not a single rook has been near the place from that time. I have often proved the fact that shooting some does not affect the rest in the least; but trapping one upsets the whole rookery for a long time. When that calamity has once taken place it is put down in their note-book, and no matter what may be the attractions of the locality, it is shunned with the greatest caution.

Unlike the ravens, the rooks are supposed by many to bring peace and prosperity about a place of abode. It is easy to understand the reasons for this idea. When Bishop Selwyn came from the Antipodes to succeed Bishop Lonsdale in the diocese of Lichfield, he did not choose to make his home at the palace, two miles away from the centre of his work, but preferred to return to the large residence in the Close. Bishop's Court in Auckland had always been the home of the Anglican missionaries when in town, and the bishop wished his English clergy to have the same feeling about his house in Lichfield. For years the rooks had forsaken the fine old elms which partially surround the Close. The year the old house was again inhabited by that true shepherd of his flock, the rooks returned to remain, and their coming back was commemorated in a very pleasant

poem written by Mrs. Curteis, the wife of Canon Curteis of Lichfield.

Nearly thirty years ago there were some great elms in Brunswick Square, which is about the centre of the city of Bristol; these had been taken possession of by a colony of rooks. This square was built at the time when the old merchants had not yet begun to forsake their dwellings over their offices to go out to homes in the suburbs. On the north side of the square was a chapel, and immediately opposite to this, across the square, a fine old mansion, which had for many years belonged to one of the old Bristol worthies and his descendants. In it, at the time of which we speak, there lived an old lady who had been for many years an invalid, and who was confined to one room which overlooked the square. To relieve the monotony of her days she always amused herself by watching the people go in and out of chapel; and when the rooks occupied the old elms she observed and noted all their proceedings with great interest, and found that they always returned after the winter —to inspect before rebuilding their nests for the breeding season—on a Sunday. Just after the bells had ceased ringing for morning service, and the congregation had gone into the chapel, the pioneer rook appeared and perched on one of the elms. After

peering about and cawing, he hopped on to two or three more trees, and then flew away, to return soon with a few more of his companions. These went through the same tactics, until by the time the people had come out from service the whole colony of rooks were in the trees examining their nests of the previous year. The following morning they were busily engaged repairing the old, and building new ones.

The poor lady grieved much when it was decided that the fine old trees were dangerous to the surrounding buildings, and the edict went forth that they were to be cut down and young ones planted in their stead, in spite of many remonstrances from the inhabitants of the houses in the square. So one November, when the rooks had gone away with their young, the work was begun.

The following February, on Sunday morning, the pioneer bird appeared, settled on the ground, gave a disconsolate caw, and flew away; and no rook was ever seen there again, much to the sorrow of their friend in her lonely sick room.

The jackdaw is a compact and lively bird; he aptly proves the truth of the proverb, 'birds of a feather flock together,' for he flies about with the rooks and feeds with them. He is a pleasing bird to

look at as he steps nimbly about; the grey cowl on the back of his head, and his keen, knowing grey eye distinguish him at once from his larger companions. His note is different, and tells that he is with them, even when flying at a distance; it is a sharp chattering 'Jack! Jack!' Where sheep are pastured suits him best as a hunting-ground; he pays them great attention, and performs a useful office for them. I have seen rooks do the same service occasionally, but the jackdaw makes it his business to look after the comfort and welfare of the flock. I have often lingered to watch his proceedings; it is most amusing to see the busy, methodical way in which he sets to work to rid an animal of its insect tormentors. All over its back and sides he hops and clings, the sheep standing quiet all the time, and knowing perfectly well that what the bird is doing is for its benefit. The animal only stirs when the other sheep have moved on, and then it and the jackdaw go together. The bird finishes off the top part of his woolly courser with the head; first one ear is examined, then the other; even the eyelids are investigated. That being done, he devotes himself to the legs and under parts. Having finished this self-imposed task of sanitary inspection, he flies off to find and comfort another suffering member of the flock.

Much has been written about two African birds with the unmanageable names of Textor Erythrorhynchus and Buphaga Africana, which attend the game of Africa and give the alarm on the approach of any suspicious object. There is nothing remarkable about that, for close to my own door can be seen rooks, jackdaws, and starlings doing the same thing, and they sound their alarm note in the same manner. If any one when passing through pasture lands looks about him, he will frequently see horned cattle, sheep, and horses feeding on the same land, and he will see four birds busy feeding in their midst, close to their noses and hoofs, namely, rooks, jackdaws, starlings, and wagtails. On the Surrey and the Southdown hills scores of sheep are saved in one year through the good offices of some members of these four families. Unlike the rook, Jackup prefers to build in the boles of trees. I have watched a pair this season from one of my windows. When breeding-time comes round, they are very quick and sly in their movements. Where chalk is quarried from the hillside for the purpose of lime-making, Jack will build in a crack or cranny, and chatter all day long, the men being busy at work below him. In some localities he will build in a rabbit-hole like a puffin.

As a pet he is well-known in the country. A

most familiar creature he is, but not of a confiding nature, though towards his master or mistress he is most affectionate, and he takes care to be on the most friendly terms with the children. No meal-time comes round without his making one of their party ; he plays with them, and if any mischief is going on, he and they are sure to be equally mixed up in it together. He thoroughly enjoys getting into mischief on his own account too. I have see him tucked up under a child's arm and borne away without his making the least fuss about it. If any stranger tried to do the same thing with him, their fingers would surely suffer. Jack puts no faith in any one outside his own home circle. The cottagers do not clip his wings unless he becomes what they term ' too owdacious ' in his tricks, like one of my own that used to make away with one or two tubes of colour, and even my palette knife, if the window of my painting-room chanced to be left open whilst I was absent for a few minutes. On my return he would fly up on to the window-sill and stick there ; no coaxing would bring him down, and now and again he would remind me he was not asleep by shouting at the top of his voice, ' Jackup ! Jackup ! Jack-e-e !

BIRDS OF PREY

BIRDS of prey are objects of interest and consideration from three widely different points of view—the gamekeeper's, the bird collector's, and the true naturalist's.

Very few gamekeepers are naturalists, although one might suppose their calling would have the effect of making them very keen ones. Now and again a keen and intelligent observer is to be found in that fraternity, but he is the exception. As a rule he is prejudiced against all birds of prey, as was his father before him ; he considers it his duty to kill anything he thinks to be injurious to the creatures committed to his charge, and he discharges that duty with zeal, although many of his nailed-up collection of birds were guiltless of some of the mischief attributed to them. Sometimes, too, I have seen amongst them specimens in a state of decay which would have fetched him a good day's pay had he been aware of their market value. The bird collector is wiser so far as that is concerned. He knows the exact market

value of the creature he requires, and exactly where to place or dispose of it when procured. We have all seen and admired collections belonging to men of means; well set-up by artists the birds often are; for a man must be an artist to be able to make a dead creature appear truly lifelike. And over the trim cases with their labels in Latin and English, the gun with which their owner is supposed to have shot them may be seen suspended on the wall. No doubt some were shot as the visitor is led to suppose; but my pleasure in several such collections is often disturbed by the remembrance of a gaunt, hollow-eyed man with a hacking cough which was never cured, in scanty, dilapidated clothing, and shoes much the worse for wear. His gun was rust-eaten, but it was a very sure one in his hands. Peregrine or bittern, heron and rail, all fell before his aim. He had one terrible weakness, however, poor fellow—he drank too freely, and whenever he had procured a good specimen his money went freely too.

When he had anything good his steps were always bent in the direction of the collections aforementioned. The poor fellow is dead now; a fit of coughing, which caused the rupture of a blood-vessel, ended his life. Silver shot never fails in killing, be the bird what it may.

If the wholesale and, from our standpoint, wanton destruction of the most interesting class of our British birds continues, those who like to observe them in their native haunts may have to go a long distance to do so. In many localities where they were once numerous not a single specimen can now be discovered, to the sorrow of the true naturalist, who believes that no creature was created in vain; each one has its own work and place in the Great Father's universe.

On the list of Raptores, the first by right is the golden eagle, a noble and very powerful bird. Sportsmen-naturalists have described him and his habits accurately; St. John, Colquhoun, and the Highland keepers of the deer forests, besides that practical and reliable authority Macgillivray. This eagle is a bird of the mountains; he does not often leave the rocks for any other purpose than a foray for food. My acquaintance with him has only been in a state of captivity. Even in that condition, unfavourable as it is to the development of his faculties, I have seen enough of his courageous spirit and enormous power of muscle to give him plenty of elbow-room. With his master or keeper he may get on a friendly footing, but even then his mood is not to be relied on; his fierce nature will break through and manifest itself

dangerously at times, and it will never be safe for a stranger to get very near him. Chained to a stand he may be, but if the chain is as long as it ought to be, it will give him the opportunity of showing some of his capabilities.

The sea eagle has also been described by the above writers. With this bird I am better acquainted. He has sometimes visited the rabbit links near the sea-shore close to my home, and lost his life by so doing, for no device was left untried by the warrener in order to compass the grand bird's death. His fee for that business was a guinea. The sea eagle is a trifle larger than the golden eagle, and not so neat in his build; in fact there is something of the look of the vulture about him. He wanders further afield; it is when his plumage is immature, and the tail brown instead of white, as is the case when the plumage is perfect, that he is confused with his nobler relative. When seen side by side the difference is great. The golden eagle has a compact muscular form and close plumage, a hawk-like bill, his legs are covered as far as the toes with feathers, and the toes, with the exception of a few large scales next the claws, are covered with small scales. The sea eagle is more lumpish in form, and his plumage is looser; his bill is long, and decidedly vulture-like in shape, but powerful.

His legs are covered with scales instead of feathers, and large scales cover the toes also ; his tail is white. It is impossible to make a mistake between the two birds at any period, if one single trait is remembered, namely that the golden eagle is feathered down to the toes, whereas the sea eagle's legs are covered with large scales.

I have seen the sea eagle when his temper was roused ; he was a fine fellow then ; the feathers on his head were raised, and the hackled feathers on his neck bluffed out, his body in a crouching position, and his wings working ready for a spring. His appearance then, combined with his yelp, gave one notice in very plain language that it would be wise to quit and give him room to get better tempered. The two that the warrener shot did not die without a fierce struggle, for they were only hit in the wing.

In a state of captivity the sea eagle is as little to be trusted as the golden, especially when out of temper. It is pleasant to know that at the present time a few gentlemen who have large properties where both species are found have given strict orders for the protection of these noble birds ; and so the greatest ornaments of the mountain side and the dizzy sea cliff may yet be saved from extermination. A price has been set on their heads for many years, and a good

one too, but not from any protective point of view so far as the deer forests are concerned, but because they have been in demand as ornaments to decorate the halls of sportsmen, or such as were ambitious of being considered sportsmen. Forty years ago they were, comparatively speaking, unmolested. In 1832, however, Maxwell's 'Wild Sports of the West' appeared, followed in 1844 by that author's 'Sports and Adventures.' In the same year Charles St. John's 'Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands' came out, and after that 'The Moor and the Loch,' by John Colquhoun. These works all contain truthful and graphic descriptions of the wild creatures in their native haunts amidst the grand scenery of Scotland and Ireland. More particularly to Scotland was the interest directed, and deer forests rose in value to figures never before looked for. Things were done also in the way of moving whole families with their sheep and wild Highland cattle, in order that these forests might be left in possession of the red deer and the golden eagle, which would sound strange if told now.

Any sportsman who had killed a red deer, stag with royal antlers, a golden eagle, seal and salmon, was entitled to the full honours of the hunter's badge. The first-named two gave him the privilege of ranking among the first order of sportsmen.

It was noticed that after the appearance of the works I have mentioned stuffed eagles or their heads, with the heads and antlers of the red deer, were indispensable decorations of a gentleman's hall if he made any pretensions to be a sportsman. Some there were who could by no means lay claim to that title, but whose walls were well covered with trophies notwithstanding. I have a very vivid recollection of such a one. He had money and a fine house, and, to do him justice, he was certainly much given to hospitality. He lived in rather a lonely district, and the few there were to visit him were somewhat unsophisticated. He was a man of taste so far as colour was concerned, and the walls of his hall would have satisfied the fastidious taste of the present day, with their soft-greenish-grey tint and dado of polished oak. A few stained-glass windows gave a rich touch to the whole. On the walls, on oak shields, were hung trophies of the chase ; on a stand in the centre of the hall was a fine eagle, well set up. Fronting the entrance door, in the place of honour, were a magnificent pair of antlers, whereon hangs a tale.

After dinner, where the wines were good and generous, he would invite his guest or guests to look at what he termed his wild beast show. He was a most genial showman, and always took pains that

everything should be made plain to the most limited capacity of mind. When he got in front of that fine pair of antlers he would look up at them and say, 'Ah! well do I remember the day when the stag that carried those noble antlers fell to my rifle on the rugged heights of the mighty Ben Voirlas. Though mortally wounded, he did not fall at once, but came to bay in a most determined manner near a huge fragment of rock. My gallant Oscar, a deerhound of undaunted courage, was killed on the spot—in attempting to pull him down—by one terrific stroke from those antlers. Poor Oscar! I have never been able to replace him. Sadly dispirited, I was compelled to leave both—as evening was near—until the following morning. Just as day broke over the mountain tops, with a couple of gillies I arrived at the spot, and found that monarch of the clouds which you see over there standing on the body of the dead stag. To level my rifle and fire was the work of a moment; and he fell dead to the shot. They are fine trophies, each in their way. You will observe that the eagle is a grand old bird, for the winters and summers of nearly one hundred years, at the least computation, have bleached the feathers of his noble head white.'

When the reader is informed that the noble pair

of horns were those of the Wapiti, the elk of North America, and that the eagle was the white-headed eagle from the same country, he will certainly give the owner of those priceless trophies the credit of a very fine and poetical imagination. The fact was, the whole collection was purchased. The last time I had the pleasure of looking it over the owner was telling a mild and succulent-looking individual of an encounter he once had with a gigantic African elephant, the skull of which he possessed with a fine pair of tusks in it; and he was in the full swing of his narrative.

'Ah well, yes, my dear sir; I must allow that nerve is required, and a certain amount of coolness too, in that sort of encounter. As you observe, a man must have his wits about him; but you soon get used to that kind of thing, my dear sir, you soon get used to it. I had lost sight of him, you see, in the dense jungle, and I could not for the life of me tell whether my first shot had told on him. These creatures, huge in bulk as they are, move noiselessly, and conceal themselves in the most cunning manner. The one whose skull we have before us was an instance of that; for before I knew anything of his whereabout he crashed out of the jungle and made straight for me, his trunk uplifted and trumpeting

most fiercely. There was no time to lose. Throwing my rifle up, I aimed at one of his eyes; the shot told, for it entered his brain, and he fell with a mighty crash almost at my feet.'

According to Eastern tradition, it is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. I fled from the presence of that mighty hunter, for I knew the skull had been bought in Wardour Street.

To return to our birds of prey, the noble jerfalcon is only a rare visitor of ours; and when he is seen it is only, as a rule, in a state of immature plumage. Why he has not been used so much as the peregrines we do not know. At the time 'Falconer's Favourites' was published, he was not with them, and that work states that all the falcons used in falconry at that date were represented in the volume. I once had the pleasure of seeing a grand female jerfalcon; quite white she was. The man who carried her had a crimson hawking-glove, richly embroidered, on his hand; it showed off her pure plumage to great advantage. She was not hooded, and merely held by the jesses attached to her legs. She sat very composedly as he carried her through the main street of a small fishing village. I fancy she had been flown in the marshes close at hand. It seems to me people were not so inquisitive in those days as they are now;

the boys were certainly not so noisy, and her tranquillity was not rudely disturbed by them.

The peregrine ranks with the jer in the falconer's estimation. He is certainly a more tractable bird to deal with than the jer; he is better known, and, from what I have been able to gather, is preferred to the jer by those who are competent to judge. As to his depredations on the grouse moors, that is a matter of opinion about equally balanced. There are as many for him as against him just now. My own vote is in his favour. I would let him and others have free range over all the grouse moors in the kingdom. When so-called wise men try to improve natural laws, they generally make a bungle of it. I know it to be a fact that in some remote districts rarely visited, and not preserved in any way, where eagles, peregrines, and other members of the tribe are common, the grouse are strong and in good packs; and that dread scourge of the moors, the disease in grouse, is not known.

The peregrine is also in request for natural history purposes, and he fetches a good price, as one can tell from the number one sees set up.

That beautiful falcon, the hobby—a peregrine in miniature—is rarely seen. From my own slight acquaintance with the bird I should say he is more

confined to certain localities than the other falcons. Well-timbered districts, partially surrounded by meadow lands, are his favourite hunting grounds, but when seen he ought certainly to be made a note of, for he is a most uncommon bird, even in suitable localities.

That dashing little fellow the merlin, or stone-hawk—a pigmy falcon in comparison with others of his family—frequents the moorlands, and prefers the northern counties to the southern ones. If he is small, yet his courage is high, for he will kill birds you would not think him capable of mastering. I have found the small falcons and the sparrow-hawk show a decided preference for birds of the finch tribe. The hobby and the merlin will kill the skylark, and, when hunger pinches, any bird they can master; but from choice they prefer finches when they can get them.

The orange-legged hobby is very rare; it can only be classed as a very occasional visitant.

Last on the list of falcons is the neat-looking kestrel, or wind-fanner, which is as well known to the country children as the cuckoo is. 'Look at he fannin' away up there; don't he winner just about,' you will hear them say sometimes. I know him thoroughly well, both in a wild and a domesticated

state. He makes a nice pet, for he does not attack your hands ferociously with bill and claws like some of the others do, and when he is in full feather, as one looks at him, perched on one's finger, he is a handsome-looking bird—a true falcon, every inch of him, although some writers have placed him on the lower form. A great deal has been written about him to little purpose. I am sure of one thing—he had in times past the honour of being carried on the fist for hawking purposes. He is a good mouse-hunter, but it must be remembered it is not always a mouse that he clutches when he drops down. His diet, like that of the other members of his tribe, is a varied one. It is a convenient way of settling the question to say that certain of these birds of prey confine their pursuit almost exclusively to a few creatures of a particular class: and probably it is satisfactory to those who state it to be so. That the kestrel does a great amount of good, no one well acquainted with him and his habits would doubt for a moment; but the time comes round when mice are to be found few and far between, and the lizard has gone to ground; and then he must have something else.

A curious thing about the mouse tribe is that there is sure to be a very abundant supply where

they are not wanted. Just now, although I am living in the heart of the country, surrounded by woods and fields, I am not able to procure mice for one of my pets, although I have offered to pay a penny a head for them. The men that thrash the stacks out with their thrashing-machines have been enlisted in this service, but to no purpose. I went to one lately, as a forlorn hope, but he said: 'I ain't had no luck, master; I wishes I had, for 'tis a rare price to offer for 'em, an' our job is a dusty one, so a drop o' beer comes oncommon handy to the likes o' us, I can tell ye. No, we ain't had no luck at all; you'd hardly believe it, but the last lot o' stacks as we thrashed lately, there warn't a mouse or a rat in them. As to traps, they ain't no good this time o' year.'

I have proved that, and not to my satisfaction in this case, for I want mice badly.

What the kestrel does at certain times is to take toll from the large flocks of birds that congregate in the fields late in the autumn, when the acorns are falling, and the beech-mast lies thick on the ground. The woodpigeons come then in flocks for their provender; the outskirts of the woods bordering on the bare fields are their favourite feeding-grounds. They are good birds for the table where their feed is

good, and they fetch a fair price in the market. Some of the men who can be trusted not to meddle with ground game, nor to get into the covers, get permission from the farmers to shoot all they can on their grounds—leaving a brace or two now and then for the owner's use when required.

That most wary bird, the woodpigeon, is decoyed within shot in this way. Close to the edge of the wood a rough shelter is made, looking much like a heap of copse trimming, thrown together in as scrambling or loose a fashion as possible. In a line with it, and within reach of the man's heavy gun, a little corn is dropped—just enough to make a show—Indian corn, also peas. About midway, or perhaps not quite so far, a tame woodpigeon is secured by a string tied round one of his legs, and fastened to a peg in the ground. Food is placed there, and water given him ; and then the shooter gets into his hiding-place. There will have been a frost in the night, probably, the sky is clear and bright, the air bracing, and there is a light breeze, causing the faded leaves to fall in showers of varied tints all round. The decoy bird is very comfortable—the position is not new to him ; he walks about as far as his tether will allow him, bows his head, struts and coos. Here comes a flock for their breakfast ; they see him, and

know by the bird's movements that food is there. After a ring round, they pitch, and begin to walk up to him. Now they have found the food; nearer they come, they are within range. Bang! three brace lie dead on the field.

Gathering up his birds, the man places himself in hiding again, and the bird, perfectly unconcerned, presently goes through his performance again for the allurement of another flock.

And now another acter appears on the scene, flashing out into the field like a brown streak, and striking the decoy. It is a sharp stroke and an effective one, for the bird falls over on his side dead. Recovering himself in the turn, the hawk swoops down on his victim. Once more a shot is heard, and the hawk, too, is dead. Muttering unheard-of blessings backwards on the author of the mischief, the shooter finds, when he reaches the spot, a male kestrel, which, although quite dead, still grasps tightly in one of his claws the head of the decoy bird, which he had taken off clean when he swooped down.

A pigeon-shooter I knew well used a stuffed woodpigeon, fastened to a piece of board, as a decoy. This bird was once pounced on by a female kestrel, and she cluttered off with it over the stubble. Another of her family joined her, and the pair fought

like furies for the dummy pigeon. He shot both at one shot; they were not knocked about, the stuffed pigeon received the brunt of the charge, and was, to use the man's own expression, 'completely ruinated between 'em.' The other choice morsels of the kestrel are turkey poults of some considerable size, the young of pheasants and partridges, and young chickens and ducklings. I have seen it stated in very positive terms that he is almost guiltless of bird slaughter. That may be so where there *are* no birds —perhaps such places are to be found—though I do not know of any. The kestrel will single a pewit out from a flock, chase him in grand form, and kill him. I admire him greatly, but he is certainly a bird slaughterer.

That fine bird the goshawk is almost extinct in this country now: he was common enough once. According to the old works on falconry the very qualities which made him highly prized in those days have been the cause of his destruction in modern times. He is a bird of most determined disposition, large and powerful. Hares, rabbits, grouse, and other creatures of the woods, moors, hillsides, and heaths, found in him a most ferocious enemy. He looks exactly what he is, a freebooter. Those I have had the opportunity of observing were brought over

from the continent, where the woods and forests are more suited to his particular method of capture than ours are. He is very swift for a short chase—in comparison, that is, with the flight of the jer and the peregrine falcons. He has a knack of striking sideways at his quarry, so as to catch it under the side of the wing when in full flight; a most deadly kind of proceeding. Hares he grapples and clings to with the grip of a vice. Puss may jump and rush with frantic mad calls of 'Aunt! aunt! aunt!'—the cry of the hare in fear and pain—but it is to small purpose, for the fierce bird bites at the back of the neck, and it is all over. Sometimes if the hare is near thick cover the hawk gets the worst of it, for she rushes into thick stuff and the hawk is knocked off and has a job to get free from the tangle. He is in use at the present time by the few gentlemen who have revived the ancient sport of falconry.

Next on our list comes that dwarf of a goshawk, the well-known sparrow-hawk. If any one curious in the matter will compare them together, he will see at a glance how very like they are in all points, with the exception of size; their habits and hunting localities are very similar too. In one point they differ; the goshawk being very rare, whilst the sparrow-hawk is a very common bird. You will find

him about everywhere, and certainly more free than welcome.

It is feeding-time for the poultry at the farm which lies snugly between the hills and close to the woods. What a commotion! The geese sound their cackling trumpets, ducks quack, the guinea-fowls scream 'Come back! come back!' turkeys gobble and the hens cackle, while their lord and master, bold chanticleer, claps his wings and crows his loudest. Master Hawk has heard the row as he was hunting for his early evening meal, and he intends if possible to profit by it. He does not come flying up openly, for caution is very necessary here; but he glides from tree to tree and along hedgerows, until he perches on one of the boughs of an old ash close to the trunk, that leans over the cart-shed in the yard.

Here comes the dame calling to her feathered charges. What a fluttering ensues! She gets the hens that have chicks just in front of her, and then she begins to feed, throwing first to the larger poultry behind. Very choice the old dame is about her chicks, for they are the last she will have this season. They are a nice size now and strong, and she can reckon on a nice little sum when she sells them as fine spring chickens in the beginning of the year. She calls them her 'pretty creeturs,' and praises their

mother, as they run about her feet, for doing so well by them. Swish! comes something, almost brushing the old lady's nose. A chick is clutched from before her very feet, and that something in the shape of a sparrow-hawk is away again.

'Drat that 'ere thing! If I don't knock the life out on it!' Dropping the remaining food she grasps the broom that is lying close to her, and brandishes it about in a very warlike manner. That the hawk is now half a mile away is no matter to her; she is taking imaginary vengeance, and giving tongue in fine style at the top of her voice. 'Father! father! are ye deaf? Don't ye hear me calling ye?'

'Yes, I kin hear ye, 'twud be a wonder if I didn't. What in the name o' airthly goodness be the matter with ye?'

'That 'ere varmint have snappered up another o' them 'ere chicks; there's nearly four shillin's gone; leastways I should ha' had it. 'Tis clear ruin, that it is. Why in the name o' mischief don't ye shoot the dratted thing? But there ain't a bit o' good talking, for that 'ere old gun o' yours as ye talks so much on at times wants a week's notice give her before she goes off.'

'Well, dame, there be other things besides the old gun as don't go off; for I ain't heard that 'ere scrub

broom go off with a bang yet, though ye did shoulder it so mighty perky like. No, it ain't gone off with a bang yet, or I'd ha' heard it.'

'Now, don't ye, father, run on in that 'ere maudlin', aggrewatin' way, as if second childishness had got ye by the nose, or you'll riz my wool up, an' git a bit o' my mind, so I tell ye.'

'Well, I dunno as that 'ud be an onusual treat, seein' I gits it pretty often as 'tis.'

'Keeper shall shoot the varmint; I'll git him to do it.'

'Ay, he shot one before, leastways he showed ye one, an' you asked him in, an' giv' him a tumbler o' that old mead. Arter that I took notes as he'd allus got a sparrow-hawk that he'd shot on this 'ere bit o' a farm. They was allus either comin' to it or goin' from it, one or t'other; 'twas cur'ous what a lot on 'em there was about all the time that 'ere mead lasted. When the stone bottle giv' out there warn't one to be sin about for love or money. No, dame, 'tain't very often as I makes up my mind to hev' my own way, but when I does I has it, and that 'ere keeper don't shoot no more hawks here. There's on'y this 'un comes, an' the wust he kin do is to snapper a chick; certin sure I be he can't drink a gallon o' old mead. Tell ye what, I'll get shepherd's

lad to snap him, he's mortal clever at that sort o' thing, an' I'll pay him fur doin' it. He'll have him, an' he wunt want to git roun' ye fur any old mead.'

The sparrow-hawk is certainly a sad plague to the poultry yard. If there is a pigeon-cote in it and the female hunts with him, the birds will not escape very easily.

As pets I can say but little in their favour. I had a pair—good specimens of their tribe—but they caused a little bother at times. They had first-class appetites, and if their wants were not attended to promptly, shriek on shriek would follow in quick succession, rousing other folks besides my wife and myself. Now and again we received gentle intimations from our neighbours that if people kept hawks they had better feed them and not let them yell with hunger. These hints did not disturb me, for my birds were well fed and never neglected in any way. Sometimes the pair pounced on my hand when I introduced it into their cage with a bird and some meat. If only one portion went in, there would be a fight and awful yelling. They would never be credited with the power they have in their slim-looking legs and toes. It is certainly a case of tooth and nail with them.

The sparrow-hawk is a bold, courageous bird

when at liberty, and he has a most evil temper when in confinement. It is most annoying to find that he will perch on your finger one moment—a clean, compact, bright-looking bird—and the next he will fall backwards, a frantic yelling heap of feathers, hanging and flapping by the jesses on his legs.

My two had a particular weakness for doing mischief. The last escapade on the part of the female caused me to give them their liberty. My near neighbour cultivated flowers; he had some very choice ones and a splendid show of them; his little conservatory was a mass of blooms. One unlucky morning, when I was making some little alterations in her jesses, she dashed off and away, out of sight like a flash. Before I could guess where she had got to, we heard a voice calling most earnestly to us to come and catch something. The door of my neighbour's little paradise was open, the morning being warm, and the feathered evil had dashed in. Before I could reach the place she had done a great amount of damage, for finding herself in close quarters she had dashed about and cut with her strong wings in all directions fuchsias, geraniums, carnations, and lilies, completely ruining them for the season. Words are inadequate to express the look on the face of their injured owner. 'Catch her, will you, as quick

as you can!' Then he added in an aggrieved voice, 'I don't think I *could* keep anything that might annoy a neighbour.'

I could say nothing in reply, for he had certainly just cause for anger. After a skirmish the bird was caught, and, tossing her into the air, I recommended her to make tracks for a warmer climate. Then I begged to be allowed to make good to my neighbour the damage the bird had done, but he behaved generously and declined that. 'No,' he said; 'you have got rid of her, and are going to let the other loose when you go in, so we will not say any more about the matter. I do not think you will regret them, from the noise I have heard them make at times.'

I quite agreed with him; as pets I had found them a failure.

The common buzzard, puttock, mouse-hawk, or mole-catcher, all which names are given to the same bird, might be more properly called the *un*common buzzard. When on the wing he is a very imposing-looking bird. When seen at a distance he has occasionally been taken for an eagle—even by those who ought to be acquainted with the birds of prey. If tamed he is sociable and amusing, when kindly treated. A noble-looking bird I consider him, but I

have seen fine specimens stuffed out of all shape by local bird and animal preservers. The mothers that hatched them would tear them in pieces as abortions could they see them. I feel I have borne much in this way, but really when my attention has been directed to a case about the size of a small chest of drawers, containing a buzzard sitting on the same branch with a woodpigeon, beneath them a teal faced by a squirrel with a white tail, and then right in front, in the place of honour, a dropsical cock-pheasant with a white stoat looking up at him in a most amiable manner, the whole decorated with tufts of dyed reed, grasses, and everlasting flowers, my wrath has burst all bounds; I have bestowed anything but a benediction, and departed.

A man would have to take a pretty long railway journey nowadays before he could get sight of a buzzard, unless he were satisfied with looking at one in the Zoological Gardens. In the wildest parts of the forest lands of Sussex he might possibly find one. They know him in Somerset, and expect to see him on the downs and in the hollows just before rain comes; for then the moles heave in all directions, and the buzzard watches their mounds until a mole heaves close to the top, then grips him. He is a clever bird; so is his relation, the rough-legged buzzard. I give

my notes upon the whole tribe we are now considering, not from any scientific point of view, but simply from my own personal acquaintance and observation.

The rough-legged buzzard looks like a small eagle. I am at a loss to understand why some have called these birds ignoble; he certainly does not look it when he has a rabbit in his claws. The rabbit, by the way, seems to have come to the front with a rush. I can remember the time when you could have your pick of the best at the rate of three for one shilling, and customers were hard to find even at that price. They were looked on as mere vermin. And at that time the two buzzards above named were to be found on the same estate. A kite, too, once located on it, and was shot; his forked tail brought him into notice. He is a bird of the past as far as England is concerned. At the time of migration, which is performed more or less by the whole tribe, a solitary one might be seen, but very rarely. Even in Scotland he is rare, and when trapped or shot his fine tail is eagerly sought for by flyfishers as a most important item in the manufacture of salmon-flies. I have seen them in captivity as pets; their owner told me he found them gentle birds. They had been sent to him from the continent.

The harrier comes next. Why he should be

called a harrier I do not know, for he does not persecute the objects he feeds on more than the other Raptores. The name has been given them, however, and it sticks to them. I know the marsh and the hen harriers best. Never were two birds more unlike than are the male and female hen-harrier. The male has a grey and white plumage, which makes him, when in the act of flying, look very like a gull, and his flapping kind of flight increases the likeness. He can move as quickly as a dart when he thinks fit to do so. The female has a brown-coloured plumage of different shades, and her tail is barred sometimes. They hunt in couples, pointer fashion, and at other times singly. A grouse would very surely come to grief if either male or female caught sight of him By the word grouse I mean black game, male or female. At one time I should have doubted that fact, but the longer folks live the more they will see if they keep their eyes open. One evening, tramping over a moor, I rose a hen-harrier from a grey hen that he had just finished picking. It was the female of the blackcock. The ranger shot him the same evening, and to my disgust nailed him up in such a manner that he was ruined as a specimen. He had not been hurt by the shot in a way to disfigure him at all, but there he was, on the shed, spread-eagled,

one nail through his head and one through each of his wings. 'I reckon he'll bide where I've put him, mister,' he said, as I looked at him.

The marsh harrier, or duck-hawk of the marshmen, is to be found in the marshes. Other birds of prey are to be seen there, but the duck-hawk is conspicuous above the rest by his size and flight. Visit the grey-green flats when the sun is glimmering through the mist, his form will be seen gliding here, there, and everywhere. Woe betide duck, coot, moorhen, or young hare that comes in his clutch, for he is hunting for his breakfast. At mid-day you will find him high up in the clear blue sky which is flecked here and there with light fleecy clouds.

Large cattle and sheep, peculiar at one time tc the marshlands, are dotted all over the great level flats. In the distance can be seen the sails of vessels which seem in places to be sailing right over the marsh. Reed-stacks are scattered about, looking like hay-stacks when seen from far. The dome-shaped objects near at hand are the halves of fishing-smacks; some are too old for use, others have been confiscated for smuggling, sawn asunder, and sold. These are used by the watchers of the marshes as temporary abiding places when the cattle require watching in case the floods are expected, or when

the weather is more than usually severe. They also serve the purpose of concealment for the long-shore shooters when fowl are on the flats, for the watchers thatch them roughly over with reeds. The word fowl, of course, includes geese and ducks of all kinds. All waders are styled hen-footed fowl, and to the hen-footed tribe the duck-hawk directs much of his attention, for they are excellent eating as a rule. A coot or moorhen is good eating from my point of view, let alone the plovers and curlews. When ducks and teal come on the flats for the season, then he is busy. Ducks are on the marshes all the year round, and breed there. The young ducks, called 'flappers,' are nearly as large as their parents, and very tender. If the duck-hawk can catch one out of the reeds, he interviews him at once; but winter is the best time for that—the early part of it, if not too severe, for the ducks do not desert the marshes then for the coast, as they will do in the hard weather.

Winter has set in, and the fowl are on the flats, flying in various directions; so is our hawk. Here comes a spring of teal that a watcher has just put up from a reedy dyke as he crossed the plank bridge with some fodder for the sheep on his back. The hawk rings round and manages to come in the nick of time for him. He takes one moment, just behind

them, to recover position. There he goes, he is in the middle of them, and comes out with a teal in his claws.

Francis Barlow, the English painter who was born in the moist country of Lincolnshire, and died in 1702, has left behind him some grand pictures of bird life in the marshes. I have gazed at one of them I know, in a private collection, for hours. The size of the canvas, to the best of my recollection, is about twelve feet by ten. The painting represents a marsh harrier dashing into a team of wild ducks. They are painted to the life. These sportsmen painters know what they are about when they take the pencil in hand. Francis Barlow must also have been a most accurate observer, for the bird represented is in the adult plumage.

Some might take positive exception to the statement that a marsh harrier has been seen on the flats so late as the early winter months, for the bird is considered by some to be a regular migrant; others believe him to be only partially one. They must settle that among themselves. Most birds move or migrate more or less. They may leave one portion of a county, and you might think there was not a single one to be found; and then you will accidentally come on them in great numbers in some corner of that same county.

There have been long discussions about the changes in his plumage. Why do not the people interested in that matter keep them as pets? That would soon settle the question.

All the birds of prey are some time in arriving at full plumage, and even then they do not retain it all for any length of time. Fresh feathers, a few at a time, are always replacing old ones. If such were not the case the birds would starve, for how could they manage to exist if they moulted like other birds? It must be remembered they have to get their living by pursuing other creatures. It is a rare thing not to find stub feathers somewhere about a hawk or an owl when you shoot it, if you examine his plumage. With regard to the stay or departure of certain classes of birds, you cannot take the particular set time which has been laid down for them as a rule for granted; for instance, the common red-winged thrush or redwing, the Norwegian nightingale, I know, has been found in full song, perched on a willow hanging over a mill pool, within five minutes' walk of a town, long after his race had been generally supposed to have gone for the season.

To see the duck-hawk at his best go to the flats after a scorching midsummer day when a thunder-storm is coming up. Most creatures feed sharp

before a storm, and he is not an exception to the rule. Heavy dim clouds have gathered, and the sun throws a flash of brilliant light low down over a portion of the marsh lands. The sails of the vessels show brightly as they sail into the light, and are lost in the shadow when they pass out of it. There is more than an hour before the sun sinks, and the storm is not yet near—it is only coming up. Making for a wide, shallow pool, surrounded by the vegetation peculiar to the salt tide flats, we sit down between two old mole-hills and look about us. Close to the edge of the pool some pewits are dabbling and splashing, while further out wild ducks are swimming, the young ones nearly as large as their mothers. One or two herons are flapping over to some fishing-ground they know of; and a couple of terns are dip, dip, dipping up and down all over the pool, making circling ripples that shine low down like golden rings in the light. The whole makes a quiet and very interesting picture; but its tranquillity is soon disturbed, for the marsh harrier sweeps over the flats, tips over the flags, almost brushing them with his wings, and pounces at the ducks. Quack, quack, sing out the old ones, their heads flat on the water and their eyes looking all ways at once, whilst they strike the water up in a

shower with their wings. The flappers give tongue as well, and try to dive; but the water where they have been dabbling is too shallow for them to do it effectually. The hawk clutches one by the tail and lifts him clear off the water. The tail comes out, and down goes the poor flapper with a squattering splash. The others have scuttled to cover, and this unfortunate one tries to do the same by flapping over the surface. The hawk has recovered position again, and the feathers are released from his grasp to come floating down on the water. With a dipping pounce he comes for the poor thing just as it is close to cover, grips it between the shoulders, and has it for supper. The terns, although quite able to baffle the intruder by their shuttlecock flight have vanished at the top of their speed, and the pewits also have gone to finish their toilet elsewhere. Not far away, however, for we can hear them calling uneasily to each other, and soon they rise from the ground by twos and threes with a short jerky spring, to settle again directly.

The reason for their restlessness is soon apparent, for overhead is the mate of the harrier that captured the flapper. Lower down comes she, just over the pewits. They can bear it no longer; up they start in a tumbling, hurry-scurry flight, flying close to the

ground, and screaming like mad things. It is no use; she makes a dash at one of the outsiders and grips him under the wing. Pewit—pewit—pewit! and all is quiet; for, like her mate, she has her supper.

Where there is plenty and to spare, a trifle is not missed. At one time those teeming marshes had a far greater supply of fish, flesh, and fowl than there was any demand for; and no one ever thought of trapping or shooting any of the birds of prey that hunted there, unless they happened to be in request as specimens by friends of the well-to-do farmers and graziers who rented the marshes. My feeling on the matter is such that, if large tracts of land of any kind, whether cultivated or not, were under my own supervision, I would not have one of the whole tribe injured. They should hunt, kill, and range scot-free.

Game preservers may have different views on the subject. When nearly all the creatures not game are classed as vermin, it is just possible to make a mistake and overlook something far more dangerous close at hand.

The harriers are more owl-like about the head than the rest of the Raptores we have mentioned. They look like a link between the owls and the hawks. Of Montagu's harrier I can only say that it is a rare

bird, and the same of the honey buzzard, for I have seen only a single specimen, and that was a dead one, which was under the hands of a bird preserver.

History informs us that owls were regarded with a feeling of superstitious awe, as a rule, by the nations of old. They were certainly considered birds of omen, generally evil. The feeling exists still, more or less, amongst certain classes and in certain localities. To make a pet of one I have found quite enough to cause a man to be set down as a peculiar being. 'What a pity some people have not something better to employ their spare time in than talking to a winking, blinking owl!' is one of the milder remarks I have survived in my character of a lover of some birds which are not usually regarded with affection. I plead guilty to a feeling of admiration for the most quaint, and in my opinion the most intelligent, members of that family of the birds of prey which we call owls.

The eagle owl, or Grand Duke, as he is named sometimes, is certainly the prince of his tribe in his native land; here he is only a rare visitant. He preys on hares, rabbits, and grouse—the great wood-grouse, or capercailzie, included; also on the other smaller creatures of the forest. He is a bird of grand aspect and great muscular power. When seen in this

country it is because he has been driven out of his course by contrary gales. Some very remarkable instances of birds coming to grief in this manner have fallen under my own observation. He will live and thrive in captivity with ordinary care and attention. One fine fellow I knew had a very great affection for his master, who had much spare time on his hands, and gave a great deal of it to his bird. He was well repaid for his attention. How the rustic population used to stare when he walked through the place with the grand owl perched on his wrist, and still more when he drove through with his favourite perched on the seat beside him! Many a wrinkled and mob-capped dame and grey old father would wag their heads after he had passed, and say, 'Tain't nateral nohow; can't be, 'tain't in reason. Tell ye what, 'tis a fermilliar sperrit o' some sort. Mussy oh alive! did ye ever!' For anything I know to the contrary that bird is still living.

A gentleman I knew made pets of eagle owls. He had a fine place to keep them in; all that could be desired it was. There was also a man kept specially to look after these birds. I had no idea of this, or I might have hesitated when invited by the owner to look at them before giving advice as to their management. A fine commotion I made by so doing. I

heard all about it later on. The man sent a message to the keeper, saying he wanted to see him at once.

'Has anything broke loose this mornin', or is a elephint comin' to live in one o' them cages, as you wants to see me so perticklar?' he asked, when he came in answer to the owl-caretaker's hasty summons.

'No, we ain't got to keepin' elephints just yet,' was the reply, 'though we may get to that pitch in course o' time—there's no sayin', for there's some wild boars comin', that's certain. But what do ye think, I've got orders for ye to ketch a hare an' bring it here by twelve o'clock.'

'What for?'

'Why, for these 'ere owls.'

''Tain't to be done. Master can have a dead 'un; an' that's a lot too good fur them goblin things.'

'Well, you knows your own business, I s'pose. I kin just tell him what you say on the p'int.'

'Don't you be a fool; you won't do nothing o' the sort. Do you think as I wants to lose my place?'

'Well, by the way you spoke I thought you warn't perticklar about it. You just look thear—you see them fresh perches, them pine boughs with the bark on, and that thear lump o' dry sifted drift sand?'

'Well, I see that. What do ye mean?'

'It means as I've took care to hev it all right, as he's told me to hev it done. He's had some one here that he's heard about to look at 'em.'

'Oh, has he? Nobody o' any count, I lay a shillin'. I should just like to fall in with him.'

'I dunno about that; the under-butler knowed him a little, leastways he'd heard on him; an' from what I could get at, he's one o' that 'ere sort as you'd better fall in than fall out with. An' it wud be handy not to forgit, as he come here as a visitor to the master.'

'And what's that lump of sand for?'

'That's for 'em to dust in, same as fowls do to clean their feathers.'

'Well, if ever I heard anything so lunaticky as that! Owls rollin' in sand to clean theirselves, like a charcoal-burner's jackass! Well, I s'pose the hare must be got, so here's off. The chaps must get the nets pitched an' drive. But as for one o' them owls killin' a hare! Ha! ha!'

True to the time the keeper arrived with the hare. The owls had not been fed that morning. 'Where's the master?' he asked.

'He's had to go out, but he left word as you was to stop an' see 'em kill that hare.'

'Then I reckons as my old ooman 'ull think I've

gone an' listed for a sodger, if she don't see me afore that takes place.'

'They've bin at that sand an' they've scuffled like mad in it, an' made it fly all over the place ; so that 'un warn't fur out o' his reck'ning. Don't ye think ye'd better let that hare have a look at 'em now ?'

'One o' them owls, nor two on 'em for that matter, wun't kill him ; but here goes, 'twill soon be proved one way or t'other.'

Both were on the alert as the hare dashed from one side to the other. The female pounced on him from her perch and killed him, and the pair ate him between them.

Then their keeper chaffed the gamekeeper right well. 'Are ye goin' to wait and see master ?' he finished up with.

'No, I ain't time, for the pheasant coops wants lookin' arter ; ye kin tell him all about that 'ere go yourself.'

Exit gamekeeper.

That splendid bird, the snowy owl, only visits England when driven by stress of weather. At one time he was a native of the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Adult birds, and young ones that had barely left the nest, were frequently met with in past times ; I am not prepared to say what may be the

case now. At the first glance the snow owl and the jerfalcon might easily be mistaken the one for the other, so far as size and plumage are concerned, if both were seen together, and they both inhabit the cold regions; where one is found the other will be. The snow owl is a bird of lighter make than the eagle owl, and his flight is more hawklike. Daylight does not affect him, for in his native wilds he hunts by day. He preys on hares, grouse, &c., like the eagle owl. The ruff or facial disk is hardly to be seen. There is far more of the falcon than the owl in his appearance. He is prized, living and dead; and although he is a very determined and dashing hunter when in a wild state, yet when captured, if properly treated, he will be as docile as a white pigeon. This is all I can say of him, speaking from personal experience.

The beautiful white owl is probably to be seen wherever an old grey church tower stands, and is, as some one else has said, the high churchman of his tribe.

When white owls were many and boys were few, I have known them to be quite at home in our own grand old church, close by the sea, and a long way from the town—a very long mile in fact. Service was held there only once a week at that time. The

presence of the white owls did not put any one out, for the church was large, the population small, and there was room for all. Their positions were quaint enough at times, and yet their fancies seemed to me to be quainter still. Sometimes an owl would be seen sitting on the sill of one of the windows, gravely examining one of the saints pictured in the fine old stained glass. Then again you might see one resting on the helmet of some long defunct old nobleman. The plumes that once adorned it had crumbled to dust, but it was graced once again for a brief space by the pure plumage of the white owl. And more than once have I seen one gravely considering the Ten Commandments. In fact, they flew all over the place and all over the people too.

The sermons were never of the fire and brimstone description ; the people there were not supposed to do anything wrong save smuggling ; and in that they were all interested to a greater or less degree in those days. The glebe-farm, with its barns and large well-filled stockyards, was close to the church. Wheat and oats, peas and beans were not thrashed by machinery at that time, and the owls found plenty of food in and about the farmyard, and a sanctuary in the church. The fisher lads who used to come home over the downs when the boats had not been able to

make the harbour tide, would whistle and keep close to one another when they left the open downs and entered that long narrow stretch of graveyard.

I have seen it many a time by moonlight when the great walnut trees threw fantastic shadows over the graves and upon the long path, a large portion of the yard lying in the mass of shadow thrown by the church ; in the distance a weird flash of water, the open sea. The hiss and snore peculiar to the owls, with their surroundings, gave the old churchyard the reputation of being haunted. And so it was at certain times, for on dark gusty nights, when the branches creaked and ground against each other, and the old fishing crones who sat huddled up round the fire said to one another that the devil was blowing the dust out of his streetdoor key and getting cross over it, the churchyard would be haunted by the living. The owls on such nights screamed their loudest, and ghostly-looking figures would glide through, each carrying a burden. They moved swiftly and silently, the burden being a tub which had come from Holland.

To all who cultivate the land in any form white owls are valuable allies, and ought not to be killed or driven away from any spot where they make a settlement. As a rule farmers recognise the fact that they

are their friends, and they will not let them be molested when they are found in or around the farm buildings. A senseless freak of fashion has lately set a price on their heads. It ought to be discountenanced.

The brown owl is a bird of the woods. He is a sturdy fellow, and a powerful one considering his size. The keeper shows his feelings towards him by a charge of shot when he has the chance, for he has a bad name. If all the accusations preferred against him were true, they would prove him to be capable of miraculous feats. I have known him to be credited with unlimited mischief, such as it would be impossible for him to do. When in confinement he takes things very easily. A feathered philosopher of the Epicurean school he is, for he eats, drinks, and sleeps to his heart's content. He is not so particular in his diet as the white owl. Almost any animal food will suit him, provided there is enough of it. His food when in a wild state consists of any birds or animals he can capture. It is the brown owl more than any other that hoots; he makes the woods echo with his Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!

The long-eared owl is also a bird of the woods, but lighter in make. He preys on nearly the same creatures as the brown owl.

The short-eared owl is smaller, but very like his

nearest relative. He prefers marshes, and rough, broken, rushy ground, and he will fly about and catch his food in the daytime.

The hawk owl, scop-eared or little horned owl, and mottled owl can only be spoken of as visitors, few and far between.

The little owl, last on our list, is one of these rare visitors. He is well named, for he is the mannikin of his tribe! well shaped, active, and good-tempered, he is a great favourite on the continent, for he makes a most amusing pet. The Dutchmen are considered to be a stolid, serious people, but under that gravity there must be a strong undercurrent of humour, or they would surely not choose the little owl as a pet and companion. I have one of my own, and I set him down as a bird of priceless value, for he has the power to make me laugh when I should be least in the mood for it.

In the exquisitely finished pictures of the Dutch masters you will see him represented; and we all know that the domestic life of Holland is faithfully depicted on those panels and canvases. Jan Steen and Teniers have introduced him into their paintings. In the painting of 'The Jealous Wife,' for instance, there is the little owl perched on the window shutter, contemplating that aged man holding sweet converse

with a young woman, presumably his niece. The old woman, his wife, has got her head in at the opening, and she also is taking in the scene most wrathfully. In the earlier ages, when paintings served the purpose of books, bird life was frequently depicted. Ancient and modern art have both drawn attention to owls, and the poor birds have often got more of it than suited them.

My own bird is at liberty. This he uses to the very best of his ability, making the third member in our small house. He is by no means the least important, for he claims and receives the greatest attention at meal times. He steps from his perch on to the hand, sits on the place appointed for him, and chatters all the time it is in progress. Sometimes, by way of a change, he will run about inspecting all things; he is very swift of foot and most inquisitive. Very affectionate too, he shows that plainly. He is about more in the daytime than in the evening or night, and he will sit in the full light of the sun; all through the hot summer of 1887 he has done so as a matter of choice. His food consists of mice of all kinds, birds of the finch tribe, old and young. Starlings, blackbirds, and thrushes he will not eat, nor insects such as chaffers and others of a similar kind; he will not even look at them. It is not always

possible to procure birds and mice for him ; then he will content himself with tender lean beef, quite fresh. He is so particular in that matter, though, that he will not eat fresh pork. He seldom drinks water, and never uses it for the purpose of washing, preferring to roll and scratch about in a lump of drift sand like a domestic fowl. In fine feather he now is, and he keeps himself beautifully clean! His legs are long, and he uses his toes and claws with the dexterity of a monkey ; in fact, when at his little games he is more like a monkey than an owl. His conversation, kept up continually, is a croon and chatter, and when in high glee he will puff the feathers of his throat out and look intently at me with his bright yellow eyes, and treat us with a solo sounding like the gobble of some unfortunate turkey. If I ask him as a particular favour to change that tune, he will give us a succession of shrill barks like a terrier. He roars like a little tiger when his dignity is ruffled, and squeaks like a pig. This does not occur very often, and when it does the fault is my own. It generally happens when he is introduced to strangers, which he hates. As a rule he is most amiable. If I wanted to cure a man of melancholy and never-smiling grief, I would present him with a little owl, the Punchinello of his tribe.

Perhaps it is because owls are birds of night that their good qualities are not appreciated. They are active and most intelligent beings. In the strictly nocturnal ones there is much difference in their bearing by night and by day. The bird that is seen drawing his wing over his body like a shield—a mere dazed lump of feathers—when the sun is shining, leaves his hiding-place and steps forth as bold and brave as an eagle in the light of the moon.

MARTENS, POLECATS, WEASELS, AND STOATS

THE *marten*, or, as he is sometimes called, the marten cat, is the largest and most handsome of this family. From the nose to the tip of his tail he measures about 2 feet 7 inches; his limbs are stout and strong, his colour a rich dark brown, with either a patch of white or yellow under the throat. In some parts he rejoices in the name of Sweet Marten, because there is not that peculiar odour about him which distinguishes the rest of his tribe. His general appearance reminds one of a small, low-legged, dark-coloured fox, his tail too being bushy. He is equally at home on the ground or in the trees, and is a first-rate runner and jumper. Sometimes he will make his place of abode on the stony hill-side, where only scrub thorns and brambles grow; then again he will make himself a home high up in the trees, in the old deserted nest of a crow or a hawk.

According to some writers, he has been extinct in

England for some years. I venture to doubt this statement for very good reasons. It is wonderful what the coin commonly called a 'sov' will bring to light at times in the rough broken ground of the border counties—genuine British creatures too, not caged ones imported and then let loose and killed.

His nimbleness and size and strength make him a sad foe to game of all kinds ; to hares—the common and the mountain hare—rabbits, and even to lambs, the shepherds will tell you. They always put their swift-footed collies on his track whenever they see him. Capercailzie, black grouse, red grouse, and any other bird that comes in his way, are included in his bill of fare. In Scotland he holds his own in spite of persecution which he undergoes from the keepers of the forests right down to the herd laddie. He has a violent affection for the capercailzie or cock of the woods. Running out of his hiding-place under some shattered fragments of rock scattered about, his rounded ears listen most attentively. It is the call or play of the cock of the woods, performed for the exclusive pleasure of his female admirers, that the marten hears. It must come from some spot in the pine forest close at hand. Very quietly going to work, he leaves the ground when he gets nearer to the tree which the sound comes from, and, climbing the

great trunk of a fir with the agility of a squirrel, he runs along the branches that touch and interlace one with another. Presently he pauses and listens; he is now close to a dead fir, and on one of its bare limbs a little below him a fine capercailzie cock sits, singing his love-song, his head thrown up, wings trailed, and his broad tail outspread like a fan and held well up over his back. The whole of his feathers are ruffled, those under his chin being raised and puffed out. His song is composed of harsh, grating gulps and sounds, something like 'Peller! peller!' but it absorbs him entirely, and his imagination has caused him to forget his instinct of self-preservation, for the marten is close up, hidden by some of the dead limbs. Once more the bird holds forth, and, as he raises his head and with half-closed eyes gives the last note—or, rather, gulp—of his dreamland song, the marten leaps on his back and has his teeth in his throat and his powerful forefeet round it in an instant. The great bird flaps off the limb where he has sung for the last time and flaps down to the foot of the tree, the marten still holding tight to him. Before the startled 'Gok! gok! gok!' of his female admirers is lost in the distance, the poor capercailzie is a dead bird and a meal for the marten and his family.

Even the squirrel does not escape when he con-

descends to notice such small quarry. To poultry he is destruction itself; once let him gain entrance to the henhouse of some lonely glen farm, and he will slaughter the lot for the mere pleasure of the thing. Hares and rabbits he tracks and captures without the least trouble. He is swift of foot, and his agility is aided by the stupid terror these creatures have when pursued by him or any other of his tribe. Hares will run from foxes or dogs as only hares can run; rabbits are equally swift for a short run of a few hundred yards; but just let one of the weasel family get on their track, as they are sure to do if the chance offers, and the hare or rabbit, as soon as he finds out what his pursuer is, becomes half numb with deadly fear. In the case of most of the weasel tribe it is the pungent scent which betrays them, but this does not apply so much to the marten.

I have often watched rabbits hunted in this way, and it is impossible to mistake their cry of terror if you have once heard it, or to forget the bewildered look of the creature and its limping gait. It will pass close to you, shrieking as it disappears in the cover. Close on its track follows the enemy, bounding along in the chase, hunting, like the hound, by scent. The end will soon come. The stoat has passed so close that we could have kicked him up in the air

as he went by had we felt inclined to do so. Listen! He has closed with the rabbit. Two cries ring out close at hand; on reaching the place they proceed from, we find the stoat has fastened on to him close under the ear, and the rabbit is dead.

The beautiful fur of the marten is valued as an article of commerce. The principal supply comes to the furriers from the Continent, where he has his stronghold and attains his largest growth and greatest beauty of coat. The vast forests and rocks give him shelter and provide him with food to his taste. There he lives and multiplies, and is, comparatively speaking, unmolested. In the winter his fur is in the finest condition, when the howl of the wolf comes from his stronghold and the quick yelping bark of the fox sounds sharp on the ear. Then that very wary bird, the full-grown, full-plumaged blackcock will have to sleep with one eye open if the marten finds out where he has perched for the night.

He varies his hunting tactics to suit his purposes. In the depths of the forest some mighty pines, fallen through decay, have formed a natural stronghold for him. In their fall they have brought others down, causing a considerable opening. Coming from his home beneath one of the huge fallen trunks, he climbs up to the top of one of the dead limbs and

listens attentively for the slightest sound of any living creature. Snow, the forerunner of winter, has sprinkled the ground, and he knows that rabbits are likely to find their way to these open spots between the tangled limbs of the fallen trees. A gurgling cackle comes to his ears through the clear night air —another unearthly solo, and again a bark. It does not disturb him, for he has heard it many times before. The cry of the eagle-owl it is, before that hunter starts on the wing. The marten watches most intently, for he expects to see the owl come near where he is watching. His surmises are right for here the bird comes, rising and falling on his grand pinions, now gliding one way, then with the next movement falling almost to the ground. He seems now lost to view, but the marten does not move from his seat; he seems to listen more intently than before. Again that goblin solo and the bark are heard, and after that another sound—a scuffling rustle—which moves him. He is down the limb and on the trunk in an instant, his body crouched and his sharp eyes peering out to catch a glimpse of a possible supper.

Two rabbits come dotting into one of the open spaces between the limbs. The marten could easily make his way nearer to them; but that is not his

intention. The snow is just deep enough to show a footprint, nothing more. In this state it suits the rabbits exactly; they bound over each other, and frisk about, scuffling the snow up with their hind feet in little powdery clouds; sitting up now and then to wipe the particles of snow from their faces and ears. Now they are off again for a final frolic before settling down to feed. Under and over the crushed limbs of the fallen pines they jump and rush, making the twigs crack and snap and rustle. The marten hears the racket; he has changed his position again, and instead of crouching on the top he is at the bottom, his sharp eyes and nose peering from between the dead twigs. The unearthly solo sounds again from some tree near at hand, followed by two barks in quick time one after another echoed by the little owl perched on a twig of one dead limb, where he has been gabbling for some time as only a little owl can. The giant of the same tribe sends his barking notes over the tree-tops, shrilly answered by his dwarf relative, who, not to be outdone in the matter, puffs out the feathers of his throat, and yelps his loudest. This is too much for the bunnies; others of their family got into trouble one night when that solo was heard, and they have not forgotten it.

The play is ended; they make for the open space

at once, which was just what the eagle-owl intended them to do, for he is perched on a limb close to the place they have rushed to. Now he has a full view of the pair as they sit upon their hind limbs and listen, their ears cocked up and twitching. The owl now crouches on his perch for one moment, his great eyes blazing with the fiery excitement that he feels at the sight of his expected prey. Swoop! and he has one. But that dead bough has balked him, and he has the rabbit by his ears and poll, instead of that fatal grip round the loins. He lifts the little animal shrieking with fear off the ground however; the rabbit draws himself up bowbacked, and kicks out his hardest with his hind limbs; he will surely kick himself free. The marten thinks so, for he rushes from his hiding-place, the hairs on his neck and tail bristled, and makes for the two struggling creatures.

If the place was a more open one the owl would lose his clutch, and drop his quarry in order to get a surer hold, but the kicking jerks from the rabbit in that small place of action have brought the pair in collision with the tangled dead limbs already. Swearing like a cat, the marten leaps and runs now here, now there, as the great owl flaps up and down with his unwilling captive. With a long shriek, and one more desperate fling from his hind limbs, the

rabbit frees himself, and drops to the ground to find himself in the grip of the marten! who, with one bite at the back of his neck, kills him at once. Such instances are not by any means rare. I have frequently noticed that one creature flying or running to save its life from one pursuer has met with death from another that has not hunted it.

The marten shares the forest with the wild-cat, the lynx, the fox, and the wolf. General readers may not be aware that up to this present year of 1889 the wolf is a most terrible foe to the flock of the Breton peasant. Any one familiar with these diminutive sheep, which are not much larger than a good hare, may guess that more than one would be required to stop a gap in the stomach of a grey, gaunt wolf as large as a Newfoundland dog. During the dread winter months they are taken into their shepherd's hut for the night for shelter—one he has built for himself in the side of some bank, the sloping roof covered with heath. Sometimes the wolves will even scratch a hole through this, and kill and eat the small sheep without attempting to attack the human inmates.

When they are pressed by hunger they will do like other creatures, satisfy their cravings at some considerable risk.

I remember once seeing a pack of foxhounds, in

trying for a fox, pass through a rabbit warren of great extent, and then not only I, but many others, witnessed a curious sight. The hounds caught the rabbits as they squatted in fear in the furze clumps. A feeble squeak; two hounds were at work, one pulling at the fore, one at the hind part, and the rabbit vanished out of sight like magic. A similar performance takes place when three or four wolves break through and clear off the small sheep of the unhappy Breton peasant; some of them do not own more than half a dozen of the tiny creatures. As to poultry, it is quite out of the question in many localities for him to keep any. The marten would kill and drag them off to his stronghold. The peasants do not destroy these hungry persecutors, because the wolf there, like our fox here, has an acknowledged protection thrown over him. It is a vague one, but it exists, or he would have been exterminated in some districts long ago.

The *Polecat*, fitchet or foumart—the last name certainly the abbreviation of foul marten—resembles his relative closely in form and colour. The odour of his fur is stronger and he is a much smaller animal, only measuring one foot five inches in length. He is, however, strongly made, very active, nocturnal in his habits as a rule, and very ferocious. That

country called 'no man's land' suits him best. Bare moorland with stone-wall boundaries running over it in parts dividing different spots of sheep-grazing ground; loose stones placed one on the other without anything to hold them beyond their own weight and the way they are built. North-country hedges these are pleasantly called. The cracks and crannies in them are the favourite hiding-places of the polecat, for, unless the shepherd's collies catch him away from home or the warrener's terriers chance to find him, he lives his life out, there, in peace and comfort. Any one who has seen a large, dark-coloured ferret, commonly called a polecat ferret, has seen a polecat to all intents and purposes.

Strange to say, the localities where I have known him to be fairly numerous were not game-preserving localities; the birds you saw there in the greatest numbers were crows, hooded crows, jackdaws, jays, and magpies; in my own native country, flat and damp as it is in many parts, he was, when I lived there, only too common an animal. It was not unusual to hear some one say, 'Terrible work in my henhouse last night, neighbour, but I've got him.' The walls there were called wet ones, dykes in plain terms. On the northern upland moors and on the sides of a wooded hill in a southern county he is quite

at home ; and he is so too in the marshlands. He can find food there in the greatest abundance ; game of all kinds, poultry when he can get it, rats, mice, birds, and fish at any risk. His fishing accomplishments have been specially remarked ; why, I do not know, for many other animals will kill and eat fish ; the domestic dog and cat, also the fox and the whole of the weasel tribe do it. He varies his diet, as all creatures like to do. During the hot summer nights the eels lie half out of the dykes on the wet margins ; it is easy for him to get one when the dew is thick on the grass, and it is rarely otherwise in the marshes. The eels will crawl from one dyke to another like so many snakes. One bite at the back of the neck, enough to stupefy but not to kill, he gives ; and he packs his fish with other things that are intended for his larder, as he has a family to provide for at that season. Some may ask how he gets eels in winter. Easily enough ; any eel-spearer—and I must plead guilty to having joined in that sport—can tell you.

The dykes at the flow of the tide are filled daily ; if all goes well the eels bury themselves in the mud, but if ice has formed, some of them are carried along on the top of the ice instead of underneath it; and these, when the tide ebbs, get numb with cold. Eels will also gather at the air-holes where some of

the dykes empty direct into the tideway, commonly called drains; there, as they gather half-numbed for the sake of getting fresh air, the polecat is sure to hook one out from under the edge of the ice, perhaps not more than half an inch in thickness, but more than sufficiently strong to bear his weight. The fisher-lads often see his tracks in the ooze if they do not see him, for the tide never flows up without leaving something behind it. Besides which the fisher-folk generally shake all worthless fish out of their nets on to the flats, under the comprehensive name of muck, before hanging up the nets to dry. So the polecat is sure to get a bit of fish of some kind or other when he hunts on the salt flats.

The marsh farmers, who hold very small grazing farms, trouble little about him so long as he does not work them mischief; but some morning on going to the henhouse a farmer finds his black-breasted game-cock or his duck-winged one dead on the floor and some of the hens with him; then he swears dire vengeance on the polecat that has sneaked in somehow, climbed the perches, and murdered them as they slept. These birds are highly valued because, when they are out on the run and the chickens are just hatched out, no marsh hawk or gull will venture to make a dash at them if their protector is there. The

birds are from the best blood. And here I will reveal a little secret: if a more than usually vicious enemy is seen flying about, the game-cock has steel spurs fixed on him when running with the fowls: on reaching home his spurs are taken off. Any one that has handled one of these courageous birds will understand the simple process. The mischief in this case, however, has been done, and the farmer means to punish the offender, if possible, by killing him. Going to a corner, he takes from it a long stout pole about six feet in length, pointed at the thickest end, called in this locality a stake. Grasping this by the middle, he walks off with it, calling Bob. 'Hi, Bob!' A rough-coated bob-tailed sheep-dog bounds up to him. His master will tell you Bob can do everything but speak to him. 'On to him, boy!' and Bob is on after him, for he has hit the trail off at once. Followed by his master, he runs and stops at a dry drain under a log bridge used when the waters are out. There he sniffs: the polecat has run through it if he is not there now. 'Hi, Bob, look out!' No need to tell him that. Now the use of that pole is seen, for it is poked into the old drain, where it digs and rattles at a rate that would bolt twenty polecats if they were hiding in it. 'On, old boy, find him!' The dog makes for a low shelter thatched with reeds, close

to the farm, which is used in hard weather for the sheep that remain in the marshes. When the farmer overtakes him there, he finds Bob at work with his broad forepaws at a hole close to one of the inner posts that support the roof.

'Speak to him, boy! What is it? Rat, eh?' The dog pauses in his uptearing proceedings, and looks out from the tangled hair which partly covers his great brown eyes into his master's face, gives a growl, as much as to say, 'Don't talk like a fool if you can help it,' and goes on with his digging at a furious rate. 'Steady, old boy, steady!' says the farmer, as he goes to another hole a short distance further on. He drives his stake into that and proceeds as he did at the drain. This time his energetic movements are rewarded, and his nose—to use his own expression—'reg'larly abominated,' for, after that gorging meal the farmer's poultry had afforded the polecat, he does not like being disturbed in such unceremonious fashion, and does his best to merit the title Linnæus gave him of *Mustela putorius*. Bob now winds him and instantly stands perfectly still, with his head a little on one side, listening intently. That rattling with the pole from side to side goes on, threatening to cause earthquake in the polecat's burrow, so he decides to quit—not in a hurry, but in

a businesslike manner. He pokes his vicious-looking head out to find a larger one than his own anxious to play a game of 'chinchopper' with him.

Bob makes a snap and misses; the polecat makes a snap in return, but he too misses. Bob gets something, however; he snaps at a mouthful of litter that is near the hole, and this does not at all improve the old boy's temper. All at once Bob leaves the hole and rushes, with a roaring bark of rage, to the other end of the shed, for the polecat, perfumed up to his eyebrows, has slipped out at another hole, and is clawing his way up the rough boards of the side. The farmer has seen it as quickly as Bob; rushing up, he swings his stake round his head and comes down 'bang!' across the beast's back, making it drop right into Bob's capacious mouth. Bob gives it one worry and then drops it for his master to carry home by the tail to the barn, where he will nail it up.

I have seen much of these sagacious dogs in my wanderings over the marshes. Their thick woolly coats, grey in colour, are a most complete protection to them in the bitter winter time. The long hair reaches down the legs as far as the toes. In the summer their masters shear them as they do the sheep, and then they stand forth in all their naked truth—long, stout-limbed, bob-tailed lurchers. The

breed is in existence now, to my certain knowledge, though some may doubt the fact. They will herd sheep or horned cattle, kill a rat or catch a hare, stand at a snipe or plover, and for the purposes of retrieving they are as good as the best water spaniels, and far more powerful when they swim, at racing speed, in the tide that runs on the flats. Under certain conditions and influences they are high-mettled dogs, and slow to anger as a rule, but when roused they are desperate fighters. Those who are versed in dog-lore can give a shrewd guess how the breed originated. I have known them run and kill hares when their coats were at their thickest. It is a long jump from the weasel tribe to the dogs, but I could not introduce the death of this most vicious member of his tribe and leave Bob out of the hunt. Between him and me there was a great personal friendship.

That beautiful and active little animal, the stoat or ermine, is 1 foot 3 inches in length from tip of nose to end of tail as a rule, though his size varies a little. In the summer his fur is a warm red colour above and cream-white below, the tip of his tail black. If the weather is hard he will change to a creamy white, the tip of his tail excepted. In that condition it forms the ermine fur of commerce. He is as bold as his larger relatives, and far more dash-

ing and active than the polecat. Stony places covered with thorns and brambles suit him best, and before those grand old hedges were grubbed up to make way for our modern scientific system of farming the ermines used to make their home there in small colonies. Mice, rats, and our common birds of the fields and hedgerows must have formed the principal portion of their food. I have never heard any complaints from the small farmers and cottagers about them, and, considering the numbers I have known hunt round about some spots, the mischief done by them was very inconsiderable. The ermine will kill game if it comes in his way, but the rabbit is more to his taste, and he must have been a friend to the farmer before the Ground Act came into force, for a rabbit that has been killed by a stoat is good eating and very white in flesh—that I can answer for. He kills them neatly too, and cleanly. He is quite at home on the limbs and branches of trees; many a nest will he rifle and then curl himself up in it to sleep off the effects of a meal of tender young birds. He is apt to gorge to excess at times. His prey he hunts with the 'go' of a foxhound. Shoot him dead as he comes bounding along, and his fur will be as sweet as you could wish it; get him into close quarters, as I have done more than once, and

you will feel inclined to quit him. The far-famed skunk of North America is not the only animal that can make you wish that you had let him alone. If you kill any of the tribe when they are enraged and at close quarters, the fur will retain the abominable odour for months—that of the marten alone excepted.

The nimble little weasel is the smallest of his tribe, only measuring ten and three-quarter inches. His colour is like that of the stoat, except that his tail is always the same colour as his upper parts, and red. White varieties have occurred, but I have never seen any white weasels in the hard winters.

There is a small kind of weasel called the Cain, Kane, or mouse-killer, that I have often seen. The rustics have called him by that name from my earliest recollections, which go a long way back. He is very small, not much longer than the short-tailed mouse that he feeds on. Naturalists have not yet determined what he is—a variety, or a small separate species; it does not matter. I have seen him and the common weasel come on to the velvety lawn of a country house, and play there the most extraordinary antics, their sole object being the capture of some wagtails that were running nimbly about, catching insects at every tumble and vault. They managed to get nearer to the birds, and their movements were

so rapid that they looked like strips of india-rubber being thrown about. Their little game was successful, for when one had got near enough he vanished behind a clump of flowers until the bird tripped by; then he had him in a flash, while his companion played the same little game with another. All the weasel tribe practise more or less the little ruse of so taking up the attention of their quarry by their strange antics that they may get near enough for a final rush when their prey is in any open space.

Small as the weasel is, he is just as destructive, considering his size, as that largest of the family, the marten. The whole tribe are bloodthirsty, and yet I have been surprised, in a long and close acquaintance with them, to see the little harm they do, bearing in mind their great destructive powers. In all the barren spots covered with loose stones that I have examined, I found mice were abundant, and so were certain birds and other creatures. And yet polecats, stoats, and weasels were found there too, in numbers varying according to the locality. Game, as I said before, was not preserved then, and it was only occasionally that you heard of mischief being done at any of the outlying cottages or farms. They fed, undoubtedly, on mice, rats, and birds, and in some instances on vermin more to be feared than themselves.

FRESH-WATER FISHES

THE reader must not expect any scientific description or minute detail. I give only a few sketches from life, from notes made by river, lake, pond, and stream as I wandered rod in hand. First on my list I find the pike or jack, a fish well fitted for the life he leads, a life of almost indiscriminate swallowing. It would be hard to say what he will not take into that mouth of his when he is hungry. If you were to fish for him with the bowl of a teaspoon he would snap it; half-a-crown properly used is a sure bait. He will swallow a frog or a dead kitten; he is not at all particular except under certain circumstances, which shall be explained further on. His form tells you at a glance his mode of life; swift and strong he is when in good condition and in good water. The colouring of his back and sides is mottled green of two shades, dotted with bright yellow spots, and white on the belly. The pectoral and ventral fins are pale brown, and the dorsal, anal, and caudal ones

darker and mottled with dark green, yellow, and white. Round his eye the ring is yellow.

So much for his points: now for his habits. Where the waters rush from the floodgates of a mill or weir, forming a swirling eddy at the side, you will find him. At the mill tail, where it is fringed with flags and rushes and shaded by great alder-trees, he is certain to be caught if you feel inclined for a spin. In deep and sluggish waters, through which the barges creep along, the water looking like thin pea-soup, he will be, not far from the bank. He is generally of a good size there. A large mill-pond suits him, if it is supplied from a clear stream, and better still if a brook runs through it. The masses of beautiful green water weed always found in such ponds afford him a hiding-place and a shelter. The best and handsomest fish I have ever caught came from such a pond. Good food, with a luxuriant growth of weed, makes a greater difference in the colour and flavour of the fish than the unlearned in such matters would credit.

I remember one lake well which was supplied with water from a moorland trout stream. Rustic tradition said that pike of giant size 'lived in that 'ere bit o' water, but they can't ketch one on 'em. Keeper told we as how the Squire wud give a gold

suvrin to no matter who if so be as one o' they big 'uns cud be grabbed. That 'ere boat hev bin out day arter day with gents in it, arter they big 'uns; but never no luck. An' what riles the Squire is jist this 'ere: them big 'uns snaps them 'ere furrin ducks up, an' no mistake. I've sin that 'ere go: 't is quick work, jist a bit o' splash, that's all. Do ye know where the boathouse is? Well, jist there 't is most menjous thick, twenty feet, may be more. They big alders hangs out over the water, dips in like; an' if any o' they furrin ducks gits swimming near there, them big 'uns snaps 'em; 't ain't no use fishin' for 'em, not a bit. They knows the smell o' hook an' line afore it goes in the water.'

I had designs on some of 'them 'ere big 'uns,' time and chance permitting, and, although I did not tell my rustic friend so, I knew why they refused live bait in the shape of fish. The stream that supplies the lake swarms with roach, gudgeon, and stone loach, to say nothing of the trout. The pike swim up to the mouth of the feeding stream, gorge themselves, like the gluttons they are, and then swim lazily back to the deep water of the boathouse.

'Are the family down yet?' I asked.

'No, they ain't. I jest wish as they was, fur I has summut ter du most days when they is; an' I

gits a drop o' beer then an' a bite. 'Tis a rale good old family, an' has good old-fashioned ways like in the matter o' eatin' an' drinkin', I ken tell ye.'

'But are you sure the pike swallow the ducks?'

'Sin 'em do it with both my eyes open,' he snapped out, irritated by my apparent unbelief. 'Ain't I told ye?' and off he went.

Patience and a silver coin will accomplish much. At last I had permission to try and catch 'one o' they big 'uns,' the ruling power in the velveteen coat, with the double-barrelled gun, assuring me 'Tis sheer waste of time, but you can please your fancy; and you can tell me by-and-by what sport you have, for I am going up in the copses.'

A breeze ruffled the lake into tiny choppy waves, just the way to suit my purpose. The trolling-rod was put together; the line run through the rings, to see that all was in working order, and then I took from a nest in the shrubs close to me a young thrush almost ready to fly. Round his body I placed an elastic band, and the hook was inserted between the elastic band and his back, and then I was ready. The band did not hurt him, for he hopped, fluttered, and chirped when I placed him on the grass. The rod was raised and the cast delivered. As the young thrush touched the water he kicked and paddled with

his wings in fine style, but not for long. He had not fluttered a yard's distance on the surface before a swirl was seen in the deep water, and a vicious snap, like that of a dog, heard; I had hooked 'one o' they big 'uns.' My tackle was strong and the hook of a particular pattern called 'snap.' Knowing by his tearing pull that I had hooked him firmly, I proceeded to punish him, and before five minutes were over he was landed. He was a fine fish, but not really 'a big 'un.' It is wonderful what a size creatures that live in the water are said to be, particularly fish.

Much has been written about playing fish. The play for the angler is when the fish kicks on the grass. When a good fish is hooked the sooner you get him landed the better.

I once fished a bit of water well stocked with pike; in fact, the pond was full of them; and I did not get a run. As I was about to pack up, having got impatient over my ill-luck, a man in the dress of a farm labourer sauntered up.

'Have ye had any sport, master?' he asked.

'Not a run.'

'I doan't wunner at it a bit; an' I reckens as ye wunt hev, if ye fishes for 'em in the fashion ye hev bin.'

'Look at the live baits. Is there anything the matter?' He looked at them, then said:

'They there gudgeons is the biggest an' most prankt'uns as I've sin fur many a day. They never cummed out o' any water round about here, I knows. They be too big fur these 'ere parts. Nuthin' wunt ketch them 'ere jacks but a caaf-tailed fly.'

'A calf-tailed fly?'

'Yes, I mean what I sez. Did ye never see one o' that 'ere sort?'

I assured him I had never come across that rare insect.

'A fly of that 'ere sort cud soon be got, werry soon; and ye can ketch as many jack with it as ever ye likes.'

'And where did you make acquaintance with that remarkable fly, my friend?'

'In the Crimear, when I was a sojerin'. There's lots o' fish out in them parts. I bin wounded; I ain't fit fur much now, an' I ain't got no pension. So I bides about like, best way I ken; does odd jobs like if they ain't too heavy.'

'What would be the price of one of those rare insects?'

'Half-a-crownd, an' ye ken have it in a couple o' days' time.

I gave him the order and marched off home, rather out of temper at my want of success.

At the time appointed I went to meet my entomological rustic, and he produced the fly from his pocket. There was not the least pretence about it for it was literally the tuft of hair off the end of a calf's tail, with two large green glass beads fixed as eyes, one on each side. One glance at the way the hook flight was arranged told me he was a true brother of the gentle craft. To my astonishment he declined the proffered half-crown, saying: 'Doan't ye niver buy a pig in a poke, 'taint healthy. Arter ye've tried 'un ye ken pay 'un; I shan't be fur off. I ain't got no leave ter fish, so I'll jest clear out. Them there jacks lays 'twixt the runs in the weeds. Let 'em hev it.'

That rare fly was thrown into one of the runs, and gently drawn on the surface towards us. Splash! and jack number one was fixed and soon landed. Four times this process was repeated, with the result that four nice-sized fish were landed: more than enough to satisfy one who never cared for fish diet. On leaving the pond I was met by our rustic flymaker. I smiled at him.

''Tis all right, I knows, master. That 'ere fly hev jest done the trick clean.'

When he had received his half-crown and a little over, he said in the fulness of his heart: 'When that 'ere fly gets the wuss fur wear I'll jest mek ye anuther fur nuthin', dang my brass buttons ef ah doan't!'

I never had occasion to profit by this generous offer, for the fly was, by reason of the material of which it consisted, almost indestructible. I sometimes see that clever rustic, and always greet him, having a respect for men of genius, amongst whom the making of that fetish-looking insect the 'caaf-tailed fly' fairly places him.

I will relate one more anecdote connected with pike-fishing before dismissing this subject. Old memories come thick and fast with it and make me feel young again. Why do those who never fish themselves, and yet have waters full of fish running through their grounds, so strongly object to other persons catching one of them? I tried to settle that question for myself once in my youth, but failed in some degree.

There was one very secluded spot on the river crossed by a weir which was a famous haunt of pike. They would head up the river for a long distance to reach the shelter of the old weir with its masses of old timber and brickwork. It was never used, but the water rushed through the gaps in the old weir-gates,

causing a continual fall into the deep pool below. Round the sides, where the eddies swept, many pike were sheltered by the great flags and rushes. The owner of that place had a pious horror of fishing and of those who fished. The place haunted my imagination to that degree that nothing would satisfy me until I had visited it rod in hand; but how was I to manage that? It would not do to cross this fine domain, for one or other of his workmen or keepers was sure to be afoot, morning or evening. The river was narrow right up to the basin of the weir. At that spot it formed a circular pool. The other portion was covered in by high banks on either side and trees. If any person on the river kept very quiet he might escape observation, so I decided to go up there in a boat, a good mile and a half from the part where I had leave to fish; and started early one fine morning with a companion.

Autumn had just begun to change the colours of the leaves. By farms and meadows dotted with cattle we quietly pulled, under rustic bridges, through more meadows, by the manor farm, under the bridge which carried the road to it; and then we were fairly in the bend of the river that led direct up to the old weir. The rods had been got ready before starting, so as to be in order for action directly we reached the spot.

Past the haunts of moorhen and water-rail we proceed in silence: now we can hear the rush of the water through the old gates. One more bend of the river, and we are there. The boat is fastened to a stout alder branch close in shore, and then we exchange significant looks, meaning, 'the left-hand pool for you, the right for me.'

Two bright dace fly in different directions, and we are both into a good fish at once, for they are on the feed. Soon they are in the boat, and with beaming countenances we are on the point of taking another pair of dace from the bait-kettle when a voice from the foot-bridge over the weir asks us, in the name of a certain place noted for the extreme warmth of its climate, what we are doing. On looking up who should we see but the owner of the property in rather a negligent sort of morning costume! For one thing he wore a dingy white hat, and he had a Bardolph nose that suggested port wine in plenty. He did not know us, but we knew him well, for a more gruff and cantankerous individual, when a bit riled, it would have been hard to find.

'Who are you? Where do you come from, eh? Do you hear me? Confound you! are you deaf? You shall remember this as long as you live, for you shall receive the very utmost that the law permits.'

Failing to get any answer riled him up to a bursting-point, and caused him to bestow titles on us that we certainly did not merit. The oars were grasped, our boat shot out into the stream, as he once more shouted out: 'Confound you! what do you want?'

'Your nose,' was the reply shouted back, 'and when I get it I shall wear a blue veil.'

Our boat then shot through his part of the river at top speed, and we never tried to get his pike again. Ah! we were young in those days!

The perch is a handsome fish when in good condition; amid favourable surroundings he runs from two to three pounds in weight. Much heavier ones than this have been caught, but they are exceptions to the general run. He is a bold biter, and not particular in his food. The schoolboys hold him in the highest estimation, for he can be captured with the rudest line and bait. There is hardly a lad to be found within reach of a brook or a pond who does not catch perch of some size or other. He likes company, and swims in shoals of twenty, thirty, or fifty. The place to fish for him is where the water runs sharply from the mill into the meadows under the old grey one-arched bridge. The brook has a general depth of about two feet. Where it flows through the meadows it is deeper, and there are rare places for perch, holes from

four to five feet in depth, where the trees that once grew close to the edge of the water have been rooted up in a storm and have torn portions of the bank away; the whole length of the brook, in fact, is a succession of holes and shallows. Green weeds wave in long bunches to and fro, as the water runs merrily on to the next mill, causing that nice curl round the holes that both fish and anglers like. There are gudgeon and roach as well as minnows in the stream, rare feed for the perch when they can be caught; but the small fish avoid the deep holes as much as possible in a very knowing manner, as though well aware of the fact that large mouths are there, ready to swallow them.

I am lingering on the old bridge to see what sport that lad who is coming across the meadow from the farmhouse will get. His rod is a bean-stick, the line thin water-cord, and the hook of the kind called 'gimp.' I know this because he produced them from his pocket to get my opinion on them this morning early. He is only twelve years old, but he has a most decided aptitude for fishing. His float is a wine-bottle cork, and his bait worms that he has just dug up from the garden. Before beginning he walks very quietly along the edge of the brook, peering over into one hole and then into the next. This one suits him,

for he throws in: and in a very short space of time he fetches out a plump, nice fish. That comes down on the grass, whack! Perch after perch he keeps landing, until my fingers begin to itch for fishing-tackle. Presently he shouts out, in a state of great excitement, 'I got 'un!' and then, 'I shell lose 'un! I knows I shell. No, I shan't—I got 'un!' and he flops a splendid crimson-finned beauty on to the grass, weighing a good pound and a half. In being taken off the hook Master Perch lets the boy know what that back fin of his can do, for which he gets a crack on the head with the butt-end of the bean-stick. Then the boy goes on fishing, and two more come to grass, his tackle is strong, and it matters not to him how they come out. He has a fine lot soon, but does not think of leaving off, for he has warmed to his work.

'Ah've got anuther big 'un; he's bigger than t'other, I know he is—he do pull so. Out ye cums!' Just as the perch is lifted clear of the water, he falls off the hook and is in again—splash! The boy looks first at the end of the line and then at the spot where the perch dropped in; then he yells out, 'Ah shan't fish no more to-day. Ah've had enough on't. Ah'm sick on't! That there fish was a sight bigger than any of they, an' ah've lost he.'

One often sees good anglers, with the best rods and finest lines that are to be bought, go home without a fish, and a little lad such as this one will get as many as he cares to carry home in his little cow-gown, and from the same brook.

At the foot of a hill a little rill rises up; through the boggy moor it runs, and through copse and wood, pasture and ploughed lands; by farms and cottages; through more meadows fringed round with woods, and then it forms the trout stream. The waters from the hill that run the whole length of it have worn a deep channel. After heavy rains the water from the slopes rushes down the stream like a mill race. Its action has cut through all that opposed it. Great oak and ash trees line both sides, sprinkled here and there with copse growth. At the more open spots you find rustic bridges, bearing the cart-roads from the meadows up to the old-fashioned farmhouses which nestle amongst the trees. Cattle of all kinds are dotted over the fresh green meadows, and come down to drink at the shallows, where they stand knee-deep under the boughs which reach from bank to bank, when the sun is so hot that the lark squats by the side of a withered tuft for shade. Kingfishers flash up and down the stream like blue rockets. You can hear one sounding his curious note before he comes

round one of the numerous bends, or you may see him perched on a twig that grows over some deep hole. The shadows from the trees make the water look dark green, bringing out his bright orange breast and the brilliant blue stripe on his back in fine relief. He will not move unless we startle him. His knowing head is cocked on one side; presently he says 'Dick!'—plunges, and for the moment you see a splash of rainbow hues, as the light falls on the rippled water and the bird. Wagtails—the pied and yellow ones—trip and peck on the sandy sides, pertly wagging their long tails, whilst that otterlike little creature, the water-vole, cleans his fur as he sits on the edge of the stream. This nimble little swimmer has his home on the banks; so have some other creatures. One notes these little things in sauntering along, as part and parcel of the stream. Beautiful trout—two-pounders, fine in form and bright in colour—have their abiding-place by the old grey bridge. There is quite a pool, and the cattle have worn the banks almost down to the water's edge on both sides. A few old posts are in the water on one side, the remains of a plank foot-bridge that has come to grief some time when the flood-waters rushed down. A few yards further down is a shallow, covered with sand and pebbles. Below this is another pool, of

considerable depth, laced and interlaced with the large roots of trees that grow on either side—rare holds for the trout. Once let him rush into that network, and your line will come back minus the best portion. He is likely to get it twisted round the posts, too, in trying to get to his home under the bridge. The silvery minnows are on all the shallows. When the trout are hungry they rush out of the holes and gorge themselves, and then return to digest the meal. Sometimes they will feed well on the shallows in the daytime; but the evening is the best time for the larger ones. Eels come then also; there are good silver-bellied ones here, as well as trout.

I was there once the whole day without getting a single fish, and could not make out what was the cause of it, for everything looked just as it had done the day before, when I had met with better luck. As I laid the rod on the grass for a wind up, I chanced to look on the shallow. There I saw a rush, and the minnows flash out of the water like tiny silver strips. My rod was snatched off the grass, the line run through my fingers, and a fresh minnow put on. Very gently I crawled along the ground to where the trout was feeding. I could just see him by craning my neck to the utmost.

Now for it ; a side cast, the minnow drops gently on the water about two feet from his nose, and with a rush the trout has it. Feeling the hook he turns for his stronghold, but we stop that. Then he springs off the shallow and comes down on his side, smash, making the water fly. He is humoured to his heart's content, and after a game fight on his part he is landed, a beauty weighing a pound and a half.

The carp is a fine-looking fellow with his golden olive-brown back and sides. The edges of his scales are golden yellow and his belly is yellowish white ; the fins are dark brown. Still water suits his ruminating disposition ; the place to look for him is a pool or pond with great clumps of flag round about it, and masses of water weeds, with channels running between them, which lead out to the open spots of deep water. I say to look for him ; to catch him is a very different matter, for he is crafty as a fox in regard to bait. On a warm summer evening you may see the carp moving about in all directions ; their great back fins showing above the water. Some of them weigh four, and some as much as seven pounds. One peculiarity about hooking a carp is that you are almost sure to do it when you are fishing for some other fish which differs entirely in its ways and habits. He is a strong creature, and

requires judicious treatment to bring him to grass. And when one has got him there, what to do with him is a question, at least to myself, with whom he is not the favourite he was with the monks of old, who were supposed to be good judges in the matter of eating. After admiring him as a fine bit of fish study I have generally restored him to his native element, very little the worse for what he has undergone, for he is a regular die-hard of a fish.

The tench is beautifully coloured in tints of greenish gold, light salmon colour, brown and olive. I used to know a rare hold for tench, and many a nicely cooked three-pounder has made a toothsome meal for me and mine. The Valley Farm lies back a meadow's length from the river where it flows over broad shallows, although here and there pools of great depth occur. The farm is old and picturesque-looking; great fronds of fern flourish in the cracks of the old wall that surrounds it, while moss clothes the sides, which are quaintly quartered with great oak timbers, worn silver grey with age. The roof is covered with large stone slabs, weather-beaten, and of varied hues, ranging from browns to greys, and dotted over with patches of house leek. The chimneys are rare specimens of good old-fashioned brickwork, such as is not often seen in these days

of hurried work. A fine old grape vine runs up one end of the building and over a portion of the roof; some of its arms run over and shade the old lead-light windows in front. At the back stand noble elms, their long branches interlacing; fine trees these for the rooks that have nested there for years; no one can tell when they first settled there. Large old outbuildings are scattered round, and the fowls and ducks wander all over the place. At the back of one cluster of sheds is a large space of broken ground; gravel has been dug here in years past, and the pits and hollows were never filled up. A small run of water, a mere drain, flows from the river to this broken ground, and in floodtime the water rushes over the meadows and fills the hollows, leaving them full when the river falls. Aquatic growth of all kinds has covered the hillocks, and the hollows and pits are covered with water-lilies mingling with fine weeds. The edges are fringed with a thick growth of bulrush and flag, varied by clumps of the yellow iris. Most congenial homes for the tench are these pools; he got there years ago, and finding the locality to his liking, he increased to such an extent as to monopolise the quarters. A rude plank bridge crosses one of the widest and deepest pits, placed there for the convenience of the workmen—who were busy at repairs

—when coming from the meadows to the farm. I have often taken my stand there on an early mid-summer morning when the light vapour floated like smoke over the meadows and water, having had leave from the farmer to fish there. As the sun got up and cleared the light vapour away you would see large back fins show above the surface of the water, and the leaves of the lily plants move up and down; then broad tails as the fish nozzled in the weeds for their food. Tracks are made in the weeds by the movements of the fish, so that there are nice openings to drop the line in.

I get well-scoured red worms for bait; nice and lively they are; my line for the first part is made of gut, for about three yards; the other portion is twisted silk, the float a small piece of cork about the size and shape of a large acorn. Now I am ready; the lively worm is gently dropped; it descends between the weeds, and the float rests lightly on the water, trembles, bobs once, twice, thrice, and then goes under; I strike and find I am into a good one. Steering him clear of the heavy masses of weed, after a few sharp turns I bring him to the edge of the pool, and soon place him in the basket. Presently there are a couple of brace of large ones there; as many as I require; for fishing, not slaughter, is my object. I

had been favoured by the farmer as being a friend of his son's; others who crossed the planks had often looked with longing eyes at the golden-green fish rolling about and feeding in the summer evenings. The pools were connected in places by water runs, and the tench roamed from one to the other at pleasure; but the spot below the rough bridge was the one most tempting to the workmen. As they sat in the shade, close to the hayloft, one day, eating their dinner, the question of a net was discussed, a casting-net; and, as their job would be finished in a couple of days' time, the last day after dark was fixed on for their little game.

Ike, the carter's boy, had gone up in the hayloft to put some nay down to the horses. Having done that he had stretched himself on the sweet old clover to have a five minutes' rest. There he overheard their plan, and told his young master of it. The boy was bidden to keep his mouth shut and to come to him again about seven in the evening. The workmen's job being completed, the young master invited them into the kitchen to have some of the home-brewed. The beverage being of the genuine malt-and-hop sort, and of a generous quality, worked on their feelings, so that they told him that if they could ever do anything to oblige him at any time he had only to say the

word. He thanked them, adding, Father and I have to go to the village on business ; and I don't suppose we shall be home till late ; so as you have finished your beer I'll bid you good evening.' As they passed over the bridge he saw them pause, and heard them chuckle softly.

Directly they were out of sight he whistled, and Master Ike mad his appearance with a plank on his shoulder. This he placed across the middle of the pool. Then he and the young master returned with a rusty and broken old-fashioned iron grate, having a cord attached to it ; this they lowered into the middle of the pool, throwing the end of the rope in the flags to hide it. Having done that they marched off with the plank.

'Ike!'

'Yes, master.'

'You go in the kitchen and tell Mary to give you a good supper and a pint of beer. After that go and hide near the pits, and when you hear them coming let me know by giving a few taps on the window.'

At about half-past ten the lad heard footsteps in the meadow, and at once communicated with his master. From their hiding place in the shadow of the old outbuildings they saw two figures come and stand on the plank bridge, and then a splash was

heard, and Ike called out, 'They're up to summut now, master, with they tench!' A tearing and scuffling of feet sounded for a moment, and then the two figures vanished into the night again.

On hauling up the old grate next day the remains of a good casting-net were found, hopelessly entangled in the jagged iron-work, a net which no one ever claimed.

The chub is a well-made and powerful fish; his upper part brownish-black, darker at the edges of the scales; bluish-white the sides are, and the belly is white. If you once hook him there is small chance of escape for him, his mouth being tough as leather. He will take natural or artificial flies, live bait and worms. As a fish for the table he is worthless; the fight he shows before he can be landed is his chief attraction for the angler. Dace and roach haunt the same waters as the chub, and one can say little in favour of any one of the three. Quality of water and difference in food may make a great difference in some. The bream I have no admiration for, either; but I must say something about that bright and delicious fish the gudgeon, which is known to every youngster who is capable of fixing a bent pin on a piece of packthread. Gudgeon are so plentiful that one can see the yellow sand on the bottom of a clear

running stream completely covered with them. They swim there leisurely along, bite well, and, for their size, are strong. Pike love to feed on them, so do chub and eels and the crimson-spotted trout; what with predaceous fish, boys, and men, he has a lively time of it, being in demand in summer and winter in some way or other for food or for bait. In the winter months he retires into holes; then the cast-net captures him.

One bright frosty day in January gudgeon were in demand for pike-fishing, and a couple of lads I knew well started to procure some in a sort of 'no man's-land' locality. One had the net, the other the can. They had never been interfered with before at that particular spot, but on the morning I speak of a great lout in velveteen coat and leather gaiters slouched up and told them he'd got them.

'Got who?' demanded the lads.

'Why, the pair on ye; an' I'm goin' to have that nice net of yours,' said the bully.

'We are on waste ground, an' you touch us or the net, if you dare!' cried the lads. 'You are not a keeper, and if you were you've no right to interfere with us on this bit of ground.'

'All very fine! I shall jest leather the pair on ye for your owdacious cheek, and have that there net too.'

With a yell of rage and indignation the lad that had the net on his shoulder threw it over the self-constituted guardian of the waste, twisted the line twice round his neck, and then both gave him what they called 'beans.' When they considered he had had enough of these, they unwound the net and jogged off with their canful of gudgeon, leaving him in a very miserable condition. He has not yet been able to take his revenge.

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